INCRIPTIONS OF PIETY AND COPTIC SAINTS

IN OLD CAIRO (FUSTAT)

by

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This paper is dedicated
in memory of my father
who encouraged me to be a lifelong learner

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An artifact in the Keir Collection of Islamic Art, a double-sided folio with saintly drawings of

haloed figures and inscriptions in Coptic and Arabic, is the subject of this paper. The artifact has

not been researched before and except for the brief catalogue entry in the Keir Collection

Catalogue, the author did not find any secondary scholarship on this artifact. It has been grouped

within the label of "Fustat Fragments," and has not been studied closely in relation to the

drawings and the inscriptions, nor have the identities of the figures of the drawings been

accurately determined. The informal quality of the line drawings and rough, hastily penned

inscriptions raise interesting questions on the nature and purpose of this object. Through a close

analysis of the visual, textual and the physical characteristics of the fragment, this paper attempts

to answer some questions raised. The questions pertain to the identification of the figures, the

stylistic and iconographical elements of the illustrations, the content of the inscriptions, the

literary corpus they originate from and, whether the fragment belonged within a manuscript, as

well as the time period and historical context of its production. The study identifies the figures as

the equestrian martyr Saint George and the Archangel Michael, who are widely venerated in

Coptic Christianity as protectors and intercessors. The inscriptions have been identified as consisting of biblical passages and extracts from psalms contained within the *Agpeya,* the book of hours of Coptic (Egyptian) Christians. For the Coptic Christians, the religiosity and reverence that the figures of Saint George and Archangel Michael inspire, the roles that define them, and the narratives that they are associated with, make them objects of devotion and power. The narratives emerging in the illustrations relate to the ideas of the triumph of goodness over evil, intercession between God and mankind and protection from adversities of life and safe passage into eternity. The discussion throws light on the Coptic painting traditions and iconographical programs that promoted the saintly narratives, and the styles that were in use in the Premodern period, such as the Akhmim Style from Upper Egypt, as well as the artists that propagated the art. The translation and analysis of the biblical content of the inscriptions, which contain invocations to Christ and Virgin Mary, brings into play the literary tradition pertaining to religious texts, the historical context of Copto-Arabic literature, the preservation of religious texts through manuscripts production, and the role of the monasteries in this area of activity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the scorching heat of the Egyptian desert, in the year 1984, a party of determined archaeologists excavating at the al-Mudhil cemetery near Beni Suef, came upon a shallow grave containing the remains of a little girl. A leather bound parchment Psalter (Psalms or Songs of Praise) was discovered gently placed under the girl's head as if to ensure a safe passage for the deceased into eternity. The discovery of this Coptic (Egyptian Christian) manuscript, dated to the fourth-fifth century, was significant as it was the oldest completely preserved biblical work that had been discovered in Egypt. It now resides in the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo as a valuable and prestigious artifact. What is even more significant about this discovery is the value that was placed on the written word and the power that was believed to be embodied in this ancient religious text. It may have been a prized possession of the family which, then, followed the little girl to her grave.[1]

One archaeological object of Egyptian and Coptic origin, which is the subject of this thesis, evokes a similar cultural significance through the embodied religious power of its written word and accompanying images. This small fragment of paper, measuring 13.34 x 20 cm, contains enigmatic drawings and interesting multi-lingual inscriptions, and is currently placed in the Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art (Fig.1). I believe that this object is a Coptic fragment from premodern times and its visual and textual material is indicative of the tradition of personal piety and devotions of Coptic Christians in Egypt.

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[1] Gawdat Gabra, Marianne Eaton-Krauss, *The Illustrated Guide to the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 162-163.

Keir Folio – Description

The two sides of the folio, which will be referred to as the Keir folio throughout the text, have figural drawings accompanied by inscriptions. The recto side portrays a haloed equestrian figure holding a spear diagonally, while the verso side has a crowned and haloed figure with wings, holding up its arms in an orant pose. The large heads of the two figures portray strongly outlined features including big, almond-shaped eyes. The inscriptions on the recto and verso sides of the folio are written in Arabic and Coptic script with small and round characters. However, on the verso side with the illustration of the crowned and haloed figure, the introductory part of the inscription is written in large, angular characters. There is also scribbled text on and around the figure itself. The Arabic text that appears on this side is composed of two sections with each section headed by a line of a secondary script that the museum records identify as Greek but which, according to my research, is actually Coptic. Even though the Keir folio is remarkably intact in the physical sense, it displays some damaged areas including visible tears and overall discoloration of the surface area. The edges are uneven and there is accumulation of debris in one place indicative of its life as an archaeological object. When put under special lighting and closely examined, the folio showed evidence of restoration work

Keir Folio and its Problematics

Until now, the Keir folio and its drawings have not been studied closely in relation to the inscriptions, nor have the identities of the figures of the drawings been accurately determined. As a result, the information available in current museum records and in the published catalogue requires further scholarship to situate the images and the inscriptions within the Egyptian-Coptic iconographic, painting and literary traditions.

The catalogue confirms that the Keir folio (accession number K.I.2014.1142) was acquired by Edmund de Unger[2] in 1976, along with twenty-four other objects consisting of paintings, drawings, sketches and calligraphic designs. A brief entry on this object consisting of a few lines was added in the catalogue *Painting and Arts of the Book* on page 63 (I.36) as follows:

> "A DOUBLE-PAGE OF A MANUSCRIPT with Arabic and some Greek text and with two drawings of Christian Saints (197 x 131 mm)…" [3]

Additionally, it was categorized in the catalogue as part of what the scholars have labelled as "Fustat Fragments." Fustat Fragments refer to an array of objects recovered from Fustat (Old Cairo) as a result of excavations in the medieval buildings and garbage mounds of the city. Beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century the excavations were conducted under the aegis of various international groups with oversight by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization. [4] Continuing well into the 1980s, the excavations yielded objects such as beads, coins, metal implements and textiles. Textual material such as legal texts, correspondence, petitions, religious material, as well as informal writings and loose-leaf folios were also recovered, creating a rich market for dealers of antiquities, collectors and museums.[5]

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[2] Edmund de Unger's private collection of Islamic art is known as the Keir Collection and consists of almost 2,000 works belonging to the vast reaches of the Islamic world. This large collection, fourth largest Islamic art collection in North America covers thirteen centuries of artistic heritage. In the 1950s he began collecting works of art and by 1961, he ended up in Cairo acquiring Fustat carpet fragments from local sources. He continued collecting art for over half a century culminating with the purchase in 2008 of what is considered the epitome of Fatimid artisanship, a Fatimid rock crystal ewer. William Robinson, "In memoriam: Edmund de Unger," *HALI* 167, (2011): 23

[3] Ernst J. Grube, "Fostat Fragments," in *Islamic Painting and the Arts of the Book*, ed. B.W. Robinson (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1976), 63.

[4] Ibrahim Abd al-Rahman & Abd al-Rahman Abd al-Tawwab, "Foreward," in *Fustat Finds*, ed. Jere L. Bacharach (Cairo & New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), vii.

[5] Jere L. Bacharach, "Introduction," in *Fustat Finds*, ed. Jere L. Bacharach (Cairo & New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 6.

Due to the absence of scholarship on the object, the few identifying markers that the museum and the catalogue provided were incomplete and inaccurate, as my research has shown. Because it was categorized under "Fustat Fragments," it was assumed to have originated from a similar time period as the remaining fragments in the category, which have possible dating to the Middle Ages (10th to 12th century CE). Therefore, I had considered it important to understand the historical and cultural context of the city of Fustat during these centuries.[6] However, stylistic analysis uncovered in my thesis research suggests a possible alternate dating of the seventeenth-eighteenth century for the Keir folio. This determination still requires further scientific analysis of the ink and paper of the fragment.

Keir Folio – Thesis

Although more precise dating of the fragment remains to be done, my thesis attempts to answer some interesting questions raised by this folio with its line drawings and rough, hastily penned inscriptions. What is the nature and purpose of this object and how do the physical attributes, the drawings, and the inscriptions contained within this object help us to understand these ideas? Currently preserved as a single piece, do the physical characteristics of the folio provide indications of its existence within a codex? Who were the saintly figures and what was their significance in Coptic Christianity? Who were the artists, what stylistic conventions were

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[6] The city of Fustat (Old Cairo) appeared in mid seventh century as an army encampment of Arab conquerors spreading outwards from Arabia and became a bustling center of civilization with growing communities of Muslims, Christians and Jews. The Fatimid empire arose in the tenth century with dominions over a vast area including present day Algeria, Tunisia, Sicily, Egypt and Syria. The rulers founded a number of capital cities including the city of Cairo (al-Qahira, "the triumphant"). Situated to the north of Fustat, the city of Cairo became their new capital in 973 AD while Fustat, plagued by famine and fire, declined from the 12th century onwards. Remnants of the multicultural city of Fustat still exist in the architectural structures of "Old Cairo" consisting of mosques, churches and synagogues. For more info see Tasha Vorderstrasse, *A Cosmopolitan City - Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Old Cairo,* eds. Tasha Vorderstrasse and Tanya Treptow (Chicago: Oriental Institute Museum Publications, 2015)

they employing and where were they drawing the imagery from? What is the nature and content of the inscriptions and how do they contribute to our understanding of the object? In that respect, a paleographical examination of the inscriptions will be made with a view to deciphering and translating the text. Lastly, an attempt will be made to understand how the text and the illustrations are connected.

Keir Folio – Argument

My assertion is that the Keir folio is an object firmly ensconced within the Coptic Christian traditions of prayers and can be understood as an attitude of religious piety that finds expression in such personal prayers. I further suggest that it may have served its owner as an intimate and personalized object of prayers and devotion; one that was imbued with apotropaic and curative qualities providing protection and healing against the adversities of life and concerns of the life hereafter. There are cues to be found in the physical structure and the attributes, the drawings of the folio and in the inscriptions, that support my understanding. Firstly, the physical structure of the Keir folio, which compares well with other extant manuscripts serving similar functions, helps us understand its use as an object of piety. Secondly, the figural drawings placed prominently within the visual field represent personalities venerated in Coptic Christianity as powerful protectors and intercessors. Lastly, textual evidence in the form of translation of the inscriptions reveals that these are excerpts and invocations from Coptic daily prayers. Determining whether the Keir folio served as a singular object or as part of a codex falls within the specialized field of codicology and can become an interesting avenue for future investigations, but it is not attempted here. The material evidence of the object, the visual evidence of the drawings and, the textual evidence of the inscriptions, contribute to the argument

that this is a personal prayer leaf which may have signified apotropaic qualities for the owner.

The Keir folio, in its humble way, reflects the artistic and literary tradition of the Coptic

Christians bound up within their faith practices and devotions. Therefore, it is important to have

a brief understanding of the historical context of Coptic Christianity as it developed in Egypt in

the first centuries of the Common Era and continued to prevail in the Islamic context under

successive Muslim dynasties.

Coptic Christians – Historical Context

According to a fourth-century church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339 AD), the

Apostle Saint Mark (d. 68 AD) came to Egypt to preach the Gospel and established churches in

the city of Alexandria. He is, therefore, considered as the founder of the Egyptian Christian

Church. The conversions to Christianity resulting from this significant event continued through

the early centuries, despite the persecutions and martyrdoms that the Christians had to endure.

The Roman Emperor Diocletian (d. 311 AD) enforced such severe hardships that later the Coptic

Church dated its calendar from the year that he became the emperor, as "year 1" of the Era of

Martyrs (AM). The conversions in Egypt picked up momentum when the Roman Emperor

Constantin (d. 337 AD) accepted Christianity in the fourth century.[7] Monasticism was another

significant movement that was introduced in Egypt by personalities such as St. Antony (d. 356)

known as "father of the monasticism," and Saint Pachomius (d. 346) founder of cenobitic

monasticism (monks living in organized communities). The monastic movement became linked

to Christianity and, for the Coptic Christians, the monks carried on the spiritual legacy of the

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[7] S.J. William Harmless, *Desert Christians – An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11.

venerated martyrs.[8] Textual resources such as *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria,[9]* which was translated from the Coptic language to Arabic in the tenth and eleventh centuries, provide an invaluable source of material about the Coptic community.[10] After the Arab conquest, the Copts were valued as educated administrators, scribes and tax collectors, having language skills in Arabic and Greek along with Coptic. Those who became prominent in government service also attained high level positions in the Coptic Church.[11] This situated the community in a position of strength even as a minority community in the Islamic era under the various dynasties that ruled Egypt: Fatimids, the Ayyubids, the Mamelukes and the Ottomans. In the Middle Ages, the Coptic community experienced shifting fortunes and episodes of hostility under some rulers resulting in the destruction and burning of churches and abandonment of monasteries. However, the community persisted in the practices relating to their faith, culture and artistic traditions. The seventeenth-eighteenth century saw a revival of the Coptic community. This was the time of religious, social and cultural renewal when ambitious programs of monastic and church architecture and decorations were implemented resulting in a rich

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[8] S.J. William Harmless, *Desert Christians – An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18.

[9] The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria is the principal text and official history of the Coptic Orthodox Church. It is not one book with an author or two but is a continuous tradition of historical writing by Coptic authors recording the history of the church and the times they lived in. The writing continued in successive generations. The earlier authors wrote in Coptic language whereas the later authors wrote in Arabic and even translated the earlier Coptic history into Arabic. The account covers the history from the first to the thirteenth centuries with a few writings that pertain to later centuries. "History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria," Claremont Colleges Digital Library, Accessed September 29, 2019,
http://ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/cce/id/985/rec/4.

[10] Tasha Vorderstrasse, "Christians of Fustat in the first three Centuries of Islam: The Making of a new Society," in *A Cosmopolitan City - Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Old Cairo,* eds. Tasha Vorderstrasse and Tanya Treptow (Chicago: Oriental Institute Museum Publications, 2015), 33.

[11] Lucy-Ann Hunt, "Christian Muslim Relations in painting in Egypt of the twelfth to mid-thirteenth century: sources of wall painting at deir es suriani and the illustrations of the new testament," *Byzantium, Eastern Christendom and Islam* 1, (1998): 211.

heritage of art, architecture and literature.[12] The Keir folio with its drawings and inscriptions

provides a miniature example of the artistic and literary tendencies of the Copts which were so

entwined within their religious sentiments, thus becoming a rich source of research.

Keir Folio – Findings

My research conducted on the Keir folio through existing art historical scholarship and

site specific contextual exploration, has brought forth new knowledge which addresses the

questions raised by this object. These findings, which will be elaborated and discussed further,

comprise original scholarship helping to broaden the understanding of the folio's historical

context and function. A synopsis is presented here.

As an archaeological object extracted from the mounds and heaps of Fustat (Old Cairo),

the Keir folio is an example of the art of Coptic (Egyptian) Christians who have inhabited Egypt

since the early centuries, well before the Arab conquest of the land. My research has identified

the figural illustrations on the two sides as Saint George, an equestrian martyr saint, and

Archangel Michael, both of whom enjoy a hallowed status in Coptic Christianity. They have

been memorialized in paintings, sculptures and dedication of churches and monasteries in Egypt

through the centuries. A stylistic assessment of the drawings and a comparison with other

artworks produced within the Coptic artistic tradition indicate that the drawings show a visual

similarity with the *Akhmim* style that flourished in Upper Egypt and could possibly be a

representation or a variant of that style. Scholarship indicates that the *Akhmim* style evolved in

late seventeenth century in the environs of Akhmim in Upper Egypt resulting from innovative

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[12] Febe Armanios, "Patriarchs, Archons, and the Eighteenth-Century Resurgence of the Coptic Community" in *The Cave Church of Paul the Hermit at the Monastery of St. Paul, Egypt*, ed. William Lyster (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 61.

influences on Coptic art. It first became visible in manuscript illumination and later encompassed icon paintings.[13] Though this style may have been shared and used by a diverse group of artists, scholars have identified two painters, Father Abdul Shaheed and Mattary, as the foremost proponents of this style. Mattary's workshop is believed to have been actively producing icons during the early part of the eighteenth century. Though the Keir folio drawings compare closely with the pictorial repertoire of the *Akhmim* style artists, a conclusive determination cannot be made but provides interesting leads for future scholarly inquiry. An investigation of the multilingual script contained within the Keir folio confirmed that the secondary script appearing with the Arabic text is Coptic. I have identified the inscriptional text of the Keir folio to consist of extracts from the daily prayers of Copts as contained in the *Agpeya*. The *Agpeya* consists of prayers, psalms and Gospel readings to be recited at various intervals throughout the day and at night.[14]

This paper has been structured in three sections which elaborate and discuss the thesis and my argument. The first section will focus on the physical aspects of the Keir folio as it exists currently as a single piece and as a portable object. The discussion will help to understand the significant cues embedded in the materiality. The second section will focus on the drawings in order to identify the saintly figures and understand the special role that they played in Coptic Christianity. The third section will translate and analyze the inscriptions to understand what is being said and how it contributes to the idea that this object is a personal prayer leaf which also

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[13] Fr. Bigoul al-Suriany, "Coptic Art during the Ottoman Period," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt – Vol 1 – Akhmim and Sohag*, ed. Gawdat Gabra & Hany N. Takla (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 281-282.

[14] "Book of Cannonical Hours," Claremont Colleges Digital Library, Accessed November 14, 2019, http://ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/cce/id/413/rec/1.

functioned in a healing and protective context. Throughout the paper, the illustrations and the

text of the Keir folio will be the crux on which the discussion will center and evolve.

CHAPTER 2

KEIR FOLIO – PHYSICAL ASPECTS

The Condition of the Fragment

The Keir folio is a small fragment of paper (13.34 x 20 cm) which is in a remarkably intact condition despite have suffered some damage. There is a discoloration of the entire surface area and the edges around the folio are ragged. In some places there is unidentified material accumulated on the surface, possibly indicative of its life as an archaeological object buried under the earth or rubble for a period of time. A blue light analysis done in the conservator's office at the Dallas Museum of Art revealed some damaged areas and tears in a few places. There is also evidence of attempts to repair the tears and the damaged areas by possibly using a gluing agent that has resulted in spots where the ink has been obscured or effaced. This is clearly evident in the drawing of the equestrian figure of Saint George on horseback. (Fig. 2, 3 & 4).

The recto side containing the Saint George illustration has an oddly shaped piece of paper with squarish sides pasted on the bottom, thereby obscuring part of the inscription. The fiber lines of this piece of paper are clearly discernible and contrast with the rest of the surface area where such lines do not appear. This circumstance makes it probable that it may have been a later addition or an accidental imposition on the surface of the folio. Coptic characters visible in a vertical orientation on this piece add weight to the idea that this was not part of the original construction (Fig. 5).

The physical characteristics of the Keir folio relating to its size, structure and materiality are important elements in understanding its function as a piece of devotional text. Though it was acquired by De Unger as a loose leaf folio, a pertinent and significant question is whether it

originated as a single piece or if it was a part of a codex and had become separated from its original body of work. Though a close examination under special lighting did not reveal any identifiable stitch marks or any evidence of pagination, a conclusive understanding in this regard would require the expertise of a person working with codices. A prominently visible vertical line running from top to bottom in the middle of the folio is consistent with the idea that it was once folded, as a manuscript or a loose leaf folio may have been folded.

The Keir folio with its drawings and inscriptions, may exist at the present moment as a singular piece, but it exemplifies the religious and literary traditions of Coptic Christianity. This tradition has found expression in the artistic and scribal activities through the centuries which brought forth numerous manuscripts preserved in the museums and monastic libraries. In Egypt, the codex (a manuscript book) as a writing support may have evolved from a parchment book and it began to be used for all Christian texts from the second century. The construction of the codex, with sheets superimposed on each other, folded and then stitched together, made it easy to open and read the inscribed text which could be written on both sides of the paper. Bindings consisting of tougher material on the outside pages helped to make the codex strong and facilitated its portability and storage.[15] The Keir folio's survival as a singular fragment is remarkable and could be attributed to the possibility that it once existed, and was protected, within a manuscript, but suffered separation at some point in time from its original context. Examples of fragmentation of manuscripts and textiles can be found in collections around the world. A case in point which helps understand this phenomenon are the excavations in Egyptian cemeteries resulting in the discovery of mummies, grave goods and funerary textiles. These

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[15] Eric G. Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers,1977), 1

moments of great discovery have also brought out, at times, the darker side of humanity. Scholars have bemoaned the "exploitation of the burials" where the finds such as burial shrouds have been known to be ripped out without much regard to documentation or conservation.[16] At times the dealers of the art market would cut up the elaborately decorated parts of the funerary textiles into many pieces to sell them individually to art collectors and antiquarians to obtain the greatest amount of profit. Hence it is not surprising to see fragments of a single garment in different collections around the world currently.[17] At the present moment, the trajectory of the Keir folio through history, is unknown, but as a Coptic fragment containing religious content it belongs within the corpus of the religious literature of the Copts.

The folios of manuscripts are generally characterized by vertical fold lines in the middle where the pages are bound together with stitches and then paginated to organize the textual and visual material. The Keir folio has a distinctly visible fold line that runs vertically down the middle of the folio, further substantiated by a tear along this fold line which became visible under the blue light. A second fold line, horizontally oriented, appears on the recto side with the Saint George illustration and finds support in horizontal tear along this line (Fig. 2). However, there is no pagination to be found on the folio and no clear evidence of stitch marks. The horizontal and vertical folds indicate that the folio may have been folded up at a point in time when it was in a singular state. This, however, does not preclude it from having been a part of a

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[16] Maya Muller, "From the History of Archaeology: The Destruction of the Late Antiquity Necropolises in Egypt Reconsidered," in *BAR International Series 1448,* ed. A. Maravelia (2005), 43-48, https://www.academia.edu/37798018/The_Destruction_of_the_Late_Antique_Necropoleis_in_Egypt_Reconsidered _2005_, Accessed on September 26, 2019.

[17] Cacilia Fluck, "Akhmim as a Source of Textiles," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt – Vol 1 – Akhmim and Sohag*, ed. Gawdat Gabra & Hany N. Takla (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 213.

manuscript, though an informal one in which the textual and visual material has a rough quality.

The informal aspect of the material is evidence itself of the personal nature of this manuscript

folio.

Examples of rudimentary type of manuscripts, with and without pagination, are to be

found in the monastic libraries of Egypt such as the Library of the Monastery of Saint Paul in the

Eastern desert by the Red Sea. The monastery takes its name from Paul the Hermit who

withdrew into the desert in the third century to escape persecution. He is believed to have lived a

solitary existence for ninety years, surviving merely on spring water and fruit from the date

palm. The monastery grew around the areas where he had lived.[18] It suffered shifting fortunes

through the centuries, but in the eighteenth century it was restored and became a functioning

monastery once more. The manuscripts contained in the library were copied mainly in the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries though there are works that date to the fourteenth century.[19]

Some Coptic-Arabic manuscripts found in the library have folios which are reminiscent of the

informal Keir folio illustrations and text. A manuscript folio with multilingual text and rough

sketches depicting the Holy Family shows organization through numbering the pages on the top

left of the verso side (Fig. 6). However, another similar folio containing Arabic and Coptic script

and two line drawings (depicting Saints Pachomius and his sister Dalusham, martyrs of

Akhmim) does not have any pagination (Fig. 7).[20] Thus, it appears that the scribes may not have

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[18] William Lyster, "Introduction – The Monastery of Saint Paul the Hermit," in *The Cave Church of Paul the Hermit at the Monastery of St. Paul, Egypt*, ed. William Lyster (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1.
[19] Gawdat Gabra, "New Research from the Library of the Monastery of St. Paul," in *The Cave Church of Paul the Hermit at the Monastery of St. Paul, Egypt*, ed. William Lyster (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 95-99.
[20] Nabil Selim Atalla, *Illustrations from Coptic Manuscripts* (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock, 2000),157.

always followed the convention of identifying the pages, especially when the intent was to

produce an informal and personal work.

CHAPTER 3

KEIR FOLIO – DRAWINGS

The imagery of the Keir folio is a significant indicator of the functionality of the fragment as a sanctimonious object which was valued and likely kept safe, allowing its survival and preservation through time. In the Coptic tradition and culture, angelic and saint figures, such as the two figures illustrated in the folio, are believed to be endowed with supernatural qualities. Not only do Saint George and Archangel Michael appear frequently in modern and premodern Coptic art, but they are also commemorated by Copts through the pious devotions and in the liturgy of the church.

St. George - The Depiction of the Equestrian Saint

The Keir folio recto contains the drawing of a haloed equestrian figure clearly identified as Saint George (d. 303 AD), a prominent Christian saint who lived in the fourth century. An Arabic inscription appears at the two sides of the halo identifying the saint by name: beginning from the right we see the word *mari* (saint), and on the left, *Jirjis* (George) (Fig. 8 & 9). George wears a simple tunic with long banded sleeves and a flowing cape, while the skull cap on his head is encircled by an oval shaped halo. His round and youthful face, depicted without a beard, features darkly outlined and penetrating almond-shaped eyes with arched eyebrows in a continuous line down to the straight nose. However, the shape of the mouth is missing which could likely be the result of fading ink or some other damage to the folio. The saint's left hand is drawn in the gesture of holding the bridle while his right hand holds aloft a spear like staff with a cross shaped top. As the saint sits astride the horse and looks down intently in a half turned posture, he targets the spear towards something on the ground below. Since Saint George is

generally depicted within the Coptic visual culture as battling a dragon, it is likely that he is

aiming his spear at a dragon though no such serpent-like depiction is visible. The horse appears

to be in full gallop or possibly rearing, as evidenced by its extended back legs and the upraised

front legs, while the tail hangs down tamely. The harness and the saddle of the horse have

embellishments in the form of medallion like ornaments *phalerae* suspended from them. The

saint's depiction in the Keir folio exemplifies a significant aspect of the life story of Saint

George as it appears in his hagiographical accounts.

St. George – Martyrdom Narratives

What are the qualities embodied in the Saint George persona and his narratives that made

him a subject of devotion and spread his fame in the Near East and westwards? Coptic Texts

translated by an eminent scholar Sir E.A. Wallis Budge (d. 1934) provide an account of Saint

George's life in the third century. He was born in Lydda, Palestine, in a wealthy Christian family

and grew up to become a soldier and a high ranking military man in the army of the Roman

Emperor Diocletian (d. 311 AD). "Encomiums," (formal expressions of praise) contained in

these Coptic Texts refer to him variously as "the sun of truth," "the star of the morning," and

"the valiant soldier of Christ." His life's narratives also emerge from Greek manuscripts copied

from the works of the great writer Eusebius, Bishop of Caesara (d. 339 AD) and from *The

Golden Legend* [21] written in the Medieval era which recounts the story of his encounter with the

dragon. [22] Hence, tales circulated about Saint George's legendary courage and exploits, which

included rescuing a princess from a dragon terrorizing the townspeople, and who could only be

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[21] Written by Jacobus de Voragine, Bishop of Genoa (1230)
[22] Elizabeth Oke Gordon, *Saint George: Champion of Christendom and Patron Saint of England* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1907), 6-16.

appeased through human sacrifice. As a reward for vanquishing the dragon Saint George is presented with worldly treasures which he does not accept, only desiring that people come into the fold of Christianity and be baptized. Saint George's acceptance of Christianity and his defiance in the face of the emperor led to his death sentence which was carried out in the form of protracted tortures and eventual martyrdom. For the Egyptian Christians, St. George's story consists of not one but many martyrdoms, and of being brought back to life by an archangel with each successive cycle, resulting in conversions to Christianity, and the continuation of his cult status.[23]

Roles of St. George – Protector and Intercessor

Saint George's heroism and martyrdom defined his role as a protector and as an intercessor for successive generations of Copts. Therefore, the Keir folio with the drawing of Saint George is firmly centered within the pious devotions of Coptic (Egyptian) Christianity. A martyr uses his body as an emblem and sacrifices it for the sake of an ideological belief. By doing this he not only makes the cause pre-eminent and known to everyone but makes himself a witness through his choice to subject himself to destruction.[24] This state of holiness leads to the veneration of the martyr's body, or the things associated with his body which become holy relics and get ritualized to become a part of the collective religious memory. Saint George's relics kept in the Church of the Virgin, also known as the "Hanging Church" (Al Muallaqa) in Old Cairo continue to attract devotees and petitioners who leave hand-written missives in the reliquary

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[23] Gawdat Gabra, Carolyn Ludwig, Morris Jackson, Gertrud J.M. van Loon, Stefan Reif and Tarek Swelim, *The History and Religious Heritage of Old Cairo: Its Fortress, Churches, Synagogue, and Mosque* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2013), 126.
[24] Saphinaz-Amal Naguib, "The Martyr as Witness Coptic and Copto-Arabic Hagiographies as Mediators of Religious Memory," *Numen,* 41, no.3 (Sep 1994): 225, 236.

cabinet seeking his protective powers. The Coptic Christian area of Old Cairo is believed to be

one of the locations where he was persecuted, tortured, and imprisoned and where a replica of his

imprisonment cell has been built. A heavy chain believed to be one of the instruments of torture,

which was put around his neck, is also preserved here and is said to have healing powers to

exorcise evil spirits.[25] Although the authenticity of these artifacts cannot be determined, their

veneration points to the prevalent and continuous devotion the Coptic community has had

towards Saint George. Saint George was revered as a martyr, but his cult status was a function

of the saint's spiritual powers which continued to perform miracles and provide protection and

succor to the faithful in their difficult times.[26] St. George's story proliferated through his images

and his icons became a representation of the struggle against evil and fear, represented by the

depiction of the dragon in his equestrian iconography. The saint's divinely inspired courage and

power, his "Good Principle," is symbolized by the spear he wields.[27]

St. George – Iconographical Aspects

Mounted warrior saints were memorialized in church frescos, sculptures, and in woven

textiles around the sixth and seventh century in Egypt. With the advent of Muslim rule in Egypt

and the Copts eventually becoming a religious minority under their new Arab rulers, they held on

to the tradition of these saints even more strongly.[28] The iconography of Saint George, as

depicted in the Keir folio has parallels in Coptic art found in museums and in the churches and

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[25] Gawdat Gabra, Carolyn Ludwig, Morris Jackson, Gertrud J.M. van Loon, Stefan Reif and Tarek Swelim, *The History and Religious Heritage of Old Cairo: Its Fortress, Churches, Synagogue, and Mosque* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2013), 151.

[26] Christopher Walter, "The Origins of the Cult of Saint George," *Review of Byzantine Studies* 53 (1995): 297.

[27] Elizabeth Oke Gordon, *Saint George: Champion of Christendom and Patron Saint of England* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1907), 19.

[28] Portland State University Millar Library Special Collections page, accessed Aug 31, 2019, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/SS7730958_7730958_10566091;prevRouteTS=1549246988781)

monasteries of Egypt from the Middle Ages to the present times. While the basic narrative of the

saint riding a horse and emerging from the left side to charge at the dragon, remains the same in

most representations including the Keir folio, additional details highlighting some of his

miraculous feats, appear in the works of Coptic painters from different time periods. For

example, an eighteenth-century icon painting of Saint George produced jointly by painters

Yuhanna al-Armani al-Qudsi and Ibrahim al-Nasikh,[29] clearly emphasizes particular details of

the narrative focusing on the role of the saint (Fig. 10). The richly garbed and booted warrior

saint has a serene look as he sits astride the horse and wields the spear. The horse rears as the

ferocious dragon wraps its tail around its hind leg. The saint's heroic tale of rescuing a princess

is represented by adding a tiny figure of a female, crowned and attired in a robe, with a *palla*

(mantle) wrapped around her, in the bottom right of the composition. The castle fortification

appearing on a hill in the background sets the spatial context of the action. Seated behind the

saint on the horse is a small figure that represents another miracle story in which the dead saint

comes to the rescue of a person in difficulty, who calls out to him. The two painters, Yuhanna

and Ibrahim, often combined the visual program of the icon with textual material in order to

clearly represent the figure and the stories being narrated, and to profile themselves as the

creators of the painting.[30]

Another example of an expanded narrative of Saint George slaying the dragon can be

found in the thirteenth century wall paintings discovered in the old church of the monastery of

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[29] Yuhanna al Armani al Qudsi and Ibrahim al Nasikh set up their workshop around 1745 and were active in icon production till about 1783. Their icons ranging in a variety of subjects and appearing with their names and the year of production inscribed on them, are to be found in the Old Cairo churches and in the Coptic Museum.

[30] Tania C. Tribe, "Icon and Narration in Eighteenth-Century Christian Egypt: The Works of Yuhanna al-Armani al-Qudsi and Ibrahim al-Nasikh," *Art History* 27, no.1 (2004): 66, 79.

Saint Antony. The frescoes are the work of the painter Theodore who was active in 1232/1233

and comprise an exceptional collection of murals featuring many equestrian saints. The priests

and patrons of the monastery may have suggested the narratives and the pictorial program, but it

was this master painter who implemented the iconographical details.[31] In the painting of Saint

George, the youthful and beardless figure faces the viewer in a frontal pose with wide open eyes.

The horse looks sideways facing the front and appears to be in a canter with one foreleg raised

and the other placed firmly on the ground. In the upper register a shield inscribed with a cross

appears behind Saint George and a hand appears from the heavens on both sides of the saint's

head. One hand holds a crown while the other makes a gesture of blessing. The saint uses the

spear in his right hand to touch the turbaned head of a small figure standing by the horse's hind

legs who is depicted as carrying a sack and a golden chandelier. There is no serpent dragon to be

seen but a domed and gabled church is visible in the bottom register by the horse's legs (Fig.11).

This wall painting of Saint George, rich with iconographical details, alludes to his status as a

warrior of God and provides an inkling of the stories and the miracles associated with him .[32]

Often the artistic renderings of Saint George and other equestrian saints represent horses in

different colors such as white, red and black. St. George is almost always depicted riding a white

horse in most Christian traditions, including Coptic Egypt.[33] The comparison of the eighteenth

century and the thirteenth century icon paintings reveals a slight shift in the depiction of the saint

and the horse. While the eighteenth-century saint has a distinct head-tilt and the horse looks

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[31] William Lyster, "Reviving a Lost Tradition," in The Cave Church of Paul the Hermit at the Monastery of St. Paul, Egypt, ed. William Lyster (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 215.

[32] Gawdat Gabra and Tim Vivian, *Coptic Monasteries-Egypt's Monastic Art and Architecture* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 57-60

[33] Helmut Nickel, "And Behold, a White Horse…Observations on the Colors of the Horses of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," *The Metropolitan Museum Journal* 12 (1977): 179.

straight ahead as it rears, the thirteenth-century depictions show the saint in a frontal pose as the horse moves in a canter and looks towards the viewer. The Keir folio's Saint George with the inclined head and the portrayal of the horse looking straight ahead seems to align with the later iconographical representation.

The proliferation of the visual imagery of Saint George was not only apparent in the architectural structures, but also found in manuscripts and the textual material produced and preserved in the church and monastic libraries. For example, the library of St. Paul's monastery contains many formal and informal manuscripts categorized as biblical, theological, historical and liturgical works. A folio from one such manuscript in this library contains half a page of Coptic script while the other half portrays a rough sketch of Saint George whose name, inscribed in Arabic, appears by the haloed head (Fig.12). Being a very basic depiction of the saint riding a horse and spearing the serpent dragon, it echoes the visual of the Keir folio figure. The saint's skull cap and tunic, and the posture of the horse as it rears up are simplistic depictions. Such informal characterizations confirm that such books may have been written and illustrated by monks to serve their individual needs. Though a dating is not mentioned for this folio, it may belong to a manuscript from the medieval times, of which few have survived, or it may belong to a manuscript copied in the eighteenth century when the library was re-established and expanded. Another example is an early eighteenth-century bilingual illustrated book of hours with drawings of equestrian saints (Fig. 13). In this manuscript, the iconography of the dragon slaying saint is familiar but the color palette consisting of yellow, green, purple, red, black and blue makes it

distinct.[34] The use of color, the neatly drawn and labelled illustrations, and the formally structured script with illuminated borders indicate this to be a commissioned work for a patron. In contrast, the Keir folio, also a leaf with illustrations and text, appears to be a simple and organic composition lending itself to the idea that it functioned on an informal level.

The images discussed above center on the figure of Saint George and his roles as understood through his hagiographical accounts. These ideas portrayed through a diversity of iconography in the paintings and in the manuscript illustrations, point to a deep connection with the saint figure. The ubiquity of these visuals in the artistic and literary traditions of the Copts Christians make them powerful symbols of devotion, piety and apotropaic qualities.

St. George - Martyr Saint to Military Saint

The cult of Saint George was not just a phenomenon of Egyptian Christianity, but his legends were widespread in the Byzantine world also where he was looked upon as a powerful protector. He was often seen in conjunction with Saint Demetrius and St. Theodore as a warrior saint. This transition from a martyr saint to a warrior saint can, perhaps, best be understood by the common threads in the life story of a saint and a soldier. Both fight for and serve an elevated authority figure, such as a king or a deity and submit themselves to harsh discipline by willingly undergoing physically painful experiences in the pursuit of their goal. It is no wonder that when the two narratives merge, a heroic figure is created.[35] Hence the three saints, looked upon as military saints, became especially popular with the soldiers in the Byzantine armies marching off

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[34] Bronwyn Dorhofer, "Coptic Prayer Book Leaves" in *Gift of the Word Exhibit Catalogue* (2012). 21-26. Accessed November 15, 2019, https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/giftoftheword/7
[35] Saphinaz-Amal Naguib, "The Martyr as Witness Coptic and Copto-Arabic Hagiographies as Mediators of Religious Memory," *Numen,* 41, no.3 (Sep 1994): 235.

to the battlefield.[36] Grouped together as cult figures, the saints' icons would be carried into the

battlefield by the soldiers and officers seeking their intercession and heavenly powers for help in

the campaign. Just as the images of Saint George were preserved in sacred spaces and in the

sacred literature of the Copts, so the icons of Saint George became objects of reverence in the

Byzantine world to be preserved and passed down through generations. [37] A medallion of Saint

George made with gold, silver and enamel, currently housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

in New York (Fig.14). is an example of one such portable object of devotion which would have

been a family heirloom. Here Saint George has a boyish face with black curly hair and holds a

cross to symbolize his martyrdom. Another icon of the three saints in the Hermitage Museum

(Fig.15) exhibits aspects of idealized Greek form and individualized Roman portraiture. The

bold stances and military costumes, the shields, swords and lances the warrior saints hold, all

become distinct representations of the Byzantine iconographical schema which continued up to

the seventeenth century.[38] In contrast, the Keir folio Saint George represents the iconographical

aspects of Eastern Christianity. Though simplistic in its pictorial representation, the drawing

holds its own as a unique characterization of Egyptian art in comparison with the Byzantine art.

Archangel Michael – Depiction of the archangel

The haloed figure in the Keir folio verso, identified on the Dallas Museum of Art website

as "a drawing of Apollo" (the Greek God), is the Archangel Michael whose name, written in

dark ink with large characters is partially legible on the top of the folio. The words "al malak"

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[36] Florin Curta, "Monica White. Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus, 900-1200," *American Historical Review* 120, no.1(February 2015): 319-320, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/120.1.319.

[37] Piatnitsky Yu, "Icon Painting," *The Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg – The Greek Treasures* (Athens: Ephesus Publishing, 2004), 315, 317, 319, https://www.academia.edu/15898199/Icon_Painting.

[38] Piatnitsky Yu, "Icon Painting," *The Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg – The Greek Treasures* (Athens: Ephesus Publishing, 2004), 311, https://www.academia.edu/15898199/Icon_Painting.

(angel) on the right side and part of the name "Mikh" (from Mikha'il) on the left side are clearly

discernible while the latter part of the name "ael" appears to have been effaced as a result of the

peripheral damage the fragment has suffered (Fig.16). The archangel wears a long robe with a

band around the neck and long sleeves also featuring two band-like registers. He has large wings

and a large head which appears disproportionate to the rest of the body. The radiate crown on his

head is encircled by an oval shaped nimbus. The facial features detailed in dark ink, consist of

expressive almond-shaped eyes, accentuated eyebrows, clearly defined nose and a diminutive

mouth. The raised arms of the archangel are reminiscent of the prayer gesture known as "orant"

which is an important feature of early Christian prayer attitudes and is widely depicted in

Christian art.[39] This posture is notably present in funerary stelae in the Coptic cemeteries of

Egypt. In these stelae the relief sculptures of the deceased stand with arms in the *orant* gesture

symbolizing the departed soul. In paintings and murals, however, the *orant* serves to highlight

aspects of the narrative or indicates a biblical character or a saint.[40] Typically, in the *orant*

gesture the palms of the hands are open with fingers facing upwards. However, in the Keir folio

drawing the archangel's raised left hand (the right hand is not visible) is in a clasping position as

shown by the short horizontal lines drawn to depict clenched fingers. This depiction aligns with

the visualization of the hand of Saint George on the recto as he clasps a spear, leading one to

understand that the archangel is also holding something. Since there is no object visible, it raises

the question why the artist did not add the detail and, if the omission was deliberate, did it signify

that the figure was being emphasized rather than the narration.

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[39] "Orant – Christian Art," Encyclopedia Brittanica, accessed April 10, 2019,
https://www.britannica.com/topic/orant
[40] Alexander Badawy, *Coptic Art and Archaeology: The Art of the Christian Egyptians from the Late Antique to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1978), 211.

Archangel Michael – Iconographical Aspects

The archangel Michael figure is a constant presence in the visual and material culture of Coptic Christianity. Churches have been dedicated in his name and Encomiums (expressions of praise) define his various roles and eulogize his heavenly powers. He is looked upon as a helper and a protector, especially when the time of death arrives for a Christian.[41] An extract from an Encomium[42] recounts the hour of death of a devout woman. As she lies on her deathbed, the priest performs the last rites, and an icon of the archangel belonging to her is placed on her eyes. The text further states that Saint Michael appears to answer the woman's prayer, embracing her soul into his heavenly light.[43] Imaginative stories such as these, documented in texts from the early years of Coptic Christianity, help us understand how the image of the archangel served as a powerful imprint on the Coptic psyche, and how a Coptic audience would respond to it spiritually, especially at significant moments of their lives. The iconographical elements used in the representations of the archangel reflect these sentiments.

Archangel Michael is generally depicted in a standing frontal position with a calm countenance and reflective eyes. Attired in an ornamental long robe with decorated scarves and bands, his figure is framed by conspicuous feathered wings. In some depictions, however, the wings are striped. He is variously painted holding a cross staff, a sword, an orb with a cross sign on it, a scale, or a Coptic cross. While stylistic diversity exists in the depictions, the iconographic

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[41] R. Marquedant, "The Role of the Archangel Michael in BL Or 7597," *Coptica: Journal of the Saint Mark Foundation and Saint Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society* 5, (2006): 34.

[42] The text of the Encomium originates in early seventh-century but is known through a thirteenth-century Bohairic Coptic-Arabic version in the British Library in London (BL Or.8784). For more details see E.A. Wallis Budge, *Saint Michael the Archangel: Three Encomiums* (London: Kegan Paul, Tranch, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1894).

[43] Lucy-Anne Hunt, "The Image as Prayer in Medieval and Early Modern Coptic Art," *Coptic Culture: past, present and future,* (2012): 197.

characterizations have remained static across many centuries, reflecting the status and the roles

of the archangel. When painted with a spear in his hand, the lower register of the painting would

show a serpent dragon being slayed, referencing the conquest of the forces of evil as represented

by the dragon.[44] This is clearly exhibited in an icon painting from the Akhmim area, found in the

Church of Saint Cyprian and Justina in which the Archangel Michael stands alongside Archangel

Gabriel and spears the dragon (Fig.17). A similar visual can be seen in another icon painting

currently housed in the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens, with the exception that, as

the right hand maneuvers the spear, the left hand holds a floriated Coptic cross (Fig.18). Yet

another icon from the Akhmim region, found in the monastery of Saint Thomas the Hermit,

depicts similar iconography with one significant change (Fig.19). While the right hand is holding

a spear directed towards the serpent dragon, the left hand holds a scale signifying the archangel's

role on the Day of Judgement.[45] The recognizable narrative of the slaying of the serpent,

showcased in the icon paintings, helps to interpret what could be happening in the Keir folio

illustration where the spear and the dragon are absent. Perhaps the Keir folio artist was alluding

to this well-known and beloved tale of edification but did not feel the need to pencil in the

details. The sketchy treatment of the imagery and the disregard for the conventional illustrative

details indicates that it was meant to function as an emblematic object, carrying the images

which were familiar and beloved, to bring comfort and solace.

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[44] Nabil Selim Atalla, *Coptic Icons II* (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock, 1998), 47.
[45] Gawdat Gabra and Marianne Eaton-Krauss, *The Illustrated Guide to the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 198.

The Radiate Crown

Emblems in art serve as expressions of important ideas and concepts and the crown of

Archangel Michael is one such emblem which adds significance and grandeur to the figure.

Though archangel depictions variously include a cross staff, a sword, a spear, an orb, a scale, and

a Coptic cross, the crown is generally not seen as a visual in the icons or in the illustrated

manuscripts. One exception, however, is a ninth century illustrated folio currently in the Morgan

Library and Museum in New York (Fig.20) whose findspot was a location near the Monastery of

Saint Michael (Dayr al-Malak Mikhail). The folio, consisting of an Encomium praising

Archangel Michael, features the haloed and crowned figure holding a cross-staff and an orb.

However, the visualization of the crown bears no similarity to the radiate crown of the Keir folio

which appears quite unique. Therefore, the crown becomes an unconventional but lofty visual

serving to remind of Archangel Michael's status in Coptic Christianity as the leader of

archangels.

The radiate crown of the archangel has many parallels in the art of antiquity whether it be

sculptures, reliefs, or coins, confirming that artistic traditions and iconographical forms existed

in a state of fluidity and perpetuity across centuries. This crown is reminiscent of the imagery of

Sol Invictus (Sun God) who attained a cult status with a full state religion in the early centuries of

the Roman Empire. Sol Invictus was a derivative of the Sun god Mithra who was widely

worshipped in pre-Zoroastrian Persia. The Roman emperors came to believe that the invincibility

of the Persian empire was due to their belief in Mithras and therefore appropriated the god in

their own pantheon.[46] A sculptural relief of *Sol Invictus (The Unconquered Sun God)* in the

National Museum of Beirut in Lebanon (Fig.21) portrays the god wearing a crown with sun rays

emanating from it, similar to the crown of the archangel. With the rise of Christianity, the sun

god imagery gets represented in the persona of Christ. In the Vatican grottoes under St. Peter's

Basilica is a third to fourth century ceiling mosaic which appears to be a combination of early

Christian and pagan beliefs and portrays Christ with a rayed nimbus, as the Sun God Helios

riding a chariot (Fig.22).[47] It is worth noting that the crown of the archangel is a unique

depiction of the *Sol Invictus* iconography as no other examples have surfaced in my research

which resonate with this imagery being used on the archangel. This makes the folio a unique and

kingly representation.

The kingly status of Archangel Michael is discussed in detail by scholar Cyril Mango

who concludes that the attribution of imperial qualities to the persona of Archangel Michael

began in Judaism where he was regarded as a patron of the people of Israel. His marvelous acts

and apparitions were rooted within Jewish-Babylonian magic and this conceptualization carried

over into Christianity where his role became that of a healer and a guardian against the powers of

evil magic and superstition. Though the Church, in the earlier centuries, condemned the worship

of angels, the archangel continued as a significant figure in the belief system and the religious

practices of the people, who continued to seek his intercession. Archangel Michael, associated

with miraculous Christian narratives, mentioned in the book of Daniel of the Old Testament and

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[46] Minou Reeves, *Deus Sol Invictus: The Persian Sun God Mithras and the Conquering God of* Rome (UK: Garnet Publishing, 2019).

[47] Margaret E. Frazer, "The Christian Realm – Iconic Representations," in *Age of Spirituality-Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Princeton University Press, 1979), 522.

in the New Testament, was looked upon as a *kosmokrator* (ruler of the world).[48] The devotions

to the Archangel also find substance in three Encomiums (formal expressions of praise) written

in a bilingual Coptic and Arabic manuscript. One of the Encomiums (BL Or 7597), a parchment

codex dated to the tenth century, is currently housed in the British Library and, as previously

discussed, has an illustration of the crowned archangel.[49] In the Encomiums three high level

Coptic clergy recount at great length the numerous occasions when Archangel Michael provides

divine assistance to prophets and holy personalities and performs miracles for Christians.[50]

Hence, as argued, the image of the archangel with the prominent crown in the Keir folio reflects

his roles as an intermediary who presents the prayers of mankind to God, a victor over the forces

of evil, and one who comes to the aid of the souls making their journey to the afterlife. This

image fits with the idea of the folio being a piece that serves a purpose larger then religiosity.

The image not only becomes prayer but also deliverance, making it a fragment imbued with the

curative and protective qualities emanating from the figure.

Keir Folio Drawings - Style

The Keir folio drawings appear to be organic representations of the Coptic narratives associated

with Saint George and the Archangel Michael. The Coptic style practiced since late antiquity had

some distinguishing features such as frontal orientation of the figures and the use of outlines [51] as

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[48] Cyril Mango, "Archangel Michael and Attis", *Bulletin of the Christian Archaeological Society (Online),* 12 (1986): 61. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/dchae.946.

[49] R. Marquedant, "The Role of the Archangel Michael in BL Or 7597," *Coptica: Journal of the Saint Mark Foundation and Saint Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society* 5 (2006): 32.

[50] E.A. Wallis Budge, *Three Encomiums by Theodosius, Archbishop of Alexandria, Severus, Patriarch of Antioch and Eustathius, Bishop of Trake* (London: Kegan Paul, Tranch, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1894), v-vi, https://tinyurl.com/y64gdcgz.

[51] Elizabeth S. Bolman, "The Medieval Paintings in the Cave Church, Phase One," in *The Cave Church of Paul the Hermit at the Monastery of St. Paul, Egypt*, ed. William Lyster (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 175.

can be seen in illustrations of angels in a manuscript folio from late antiquity (in the Chester

Beatty Library, Dublin) and an illustration of Archangel Michael from the middle ages (in

Morgan Library, New York) respectively (Fig.20 & 28). The Keir folio figures share stylistic

similarities with these examples in the use of lines. However, a close analysis of the two angels

in the Chester Beatty folio, reveals many more parallels with the Keir folio archangel in the

depiction of the facial characteristics, the long robes, the head covering and the halo. Besides the

distinct Coptic style, the Keir folio illustrations also demonstrate a glimmer of other influences

as pointed out in scholarship, which will be discussed. Coming forward in time to the premodern

era, the Keir folio illustrations show affinity to a style that Coptic scholars have labelled as the

Akhmim Style which was used to create objects of devotion and veneration. The style, which

itself showcases a diversity of representations, derives its name from the town of Akhmim and its

surrounding areas located in Upper Egypt and is believed to be a late seventeenth-century

development.[52] Hence, the question arises whether the Keir folio drawings are an expression of

this style, and do they emerge from this time period? This question formulates an interesting

hypothesis that requires a comprehensive study which the scope of this paper does not allow.

However, an attempt has been made to engage with this question to a limited extent and bring

knowledge to the fore, by analyzing the style and its practitioners, what it stood for and whether

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[52] Akhmim is a major city in the province of Suhaj in Upper Egypt about 250 miles south of Cairo. It is situated on the right bank of the Nile. In the Byzantine period this city was known as Panopolis. The name Akhmim is an Arabized version of the pharaonic name Chemmis. Al-Maqrizi, a fifteenth century Muslim historian mentions Akhmim with reference to the monasteries that existed in the area. There are still some monasteries to be found here. For details see Rene-Georges Coquin, "Akhmim," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia, Volume I*, (Claremont Graduate University, School of Religion: McMillan, 1991), accessed 09/17/2019, http://ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/cce/id/93/rec/1.

it had any antecedents in earlier centuries. This would set the stage for future studies to make a clear and more conclusive determination of the Keir folio style and its historical context.

At this point, it would be a useful exercise to analyze some of the prevalent styles employed by Coptic artists in the pictorial program of the churches and the monasteries, and in the illustrations of the manuscripts. Ibrahim al-Nasikh (d. 1785) and Yuhanna al-Armani al-Qudsi (the Armenian of Jerusalem) (d. ca.1783) were two renowned artists from the mid-eighteenth century who were painting icons for the churches of Old Cairo. Ibrahim al-Nasikh ("The Copyist") was also trained as a scribe and was an expert reader and editor of texts.[53] Their workshop was active between 1742 and 1783 and they often collaborated, as is evident in the Arabic and Coptic inscriptions on some of the icons where both their names appear along with the year of production. Their depictions of Saint George and Archangel Michael are highly stylized, ornate, and colorful. Saint George often appears in the garb of a soldier wearing a cuirass with his cloak flying in the wind as he spears the ferocious looking serpent-dragon. The well modeled face and the wavy locks present a somewhat androgynous look. The style is painterly, and care has been taken to fill in detailed decorative motifs in the figure of the saint and the steed (Fig.23). The icons of Archangel Michael also portray beautiful faces with long wavy hair. The large and colorfully patterned wings form the backdrop for tunics with decorative scarves and belts and in some cases sumptuous clothing and jewels (Fig.24). One of the inscriptions calls on the Archangel to be an intercessor in heaven for the painter so he can get his reward.[54] These representations of the saint and the archangel by the two artists, with well

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[53] Mark N. Swanson, "The Monastery of St. Paul in Historical Context," in *The Cave Church of Paul the Hermit at the Monastery of St. Paul, Egypt*, ed. William Lyster (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 57.
[54] Gawdat Gabra and Marianne Eaton-Krauss, *The Illustrated Guide to the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 198-199.

modeled faces and intricate decorations reminiscent of Byzantine style, are far removed from the style of the images in the Keir folio which are simple two-dimensional line drawings. Crafted with just ink and paper, with no effort expended towards adding decorations or color, the drawings seem to suggest a purpose that is more spiritual than aesthetic: icons not only serve as reminders of the divine but can also be the channel to reach the divine through the holy figure depicted. Therefore, the simple imagery of the Keir folio is valuable as it channels spiritual powers for its owner.

A few decades before Ibrahim and Yuhanna were active, another painter known as Mattary (active ca.1732) distinguished himself in icon paintings. His work consisting of icons, triptychs and ciboria (a columned structure with a cupola covering the altar) are found in several places in Egypt, including Old Cairo, the monasteries of Wadi'n Natrun, the two Red Sea monasteries of St. Antony and St. Paul, as well as the churches and monasteries around Akhmim. Scholars such as Van Moorsel[55] believe that Mattary was an Armenian who may have come from Jerusalem. The style is refined and professional in the icons of various sizes, suggesting that Mattary had learnt the craft as a professional painter and may have been associated with a workshop. His icon of Saint George found in the Monastery of St. Mercurius in Old Cairo is a polished work that stays true to the iconography and the narrative of the saint (Fig.25). The colors are restrained but much attention has been paid to detailing as evident in the halo with the decorative border, the garments of the saint and the finery of the horse. Elegant explanatory Arabic script appears in cartouches on both sides of the haloed head. Mattary and his school are

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[55] Professor of Coptic Studies at the University of Leiden, Netherlands

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believed to have also illuminated manuscripts of which two have been identified.[56] Mattary has

been grouped with Father Abdul Shaheed as one of the painters who were practicing the

Akhmim style of icon painting.

Scholar Skalova believes that Mattary, who was an Armenian, was influenced by an

"oriental style" from the Silk Road which was prevalent in the Beylik-Mamluk[57] times,

demonstrating a vibrant artistic exchange between Islamic and Christian visual cultures. This

style used in icon painting gave rise to "Mameluke icons" reminiscent of thirteenth century

Islamic art. These icons were simple in style with saintly figures in frontal poses, drawn in black

lines with garments and robes simply outlined without any delineation of folds. The faces were

highlighted by large, soulful eyes looking at the beholder. Their haloes were not completely

circular, and some haloes had an oval shape with a ray-like pattern suggesting the pre-Christian

art of Palmyra, in Syria. The feet, with their morocco boots were always turned sideways.[58] The

Keir folio drawings display many of the characteristics highlighted and suggest interesting

connections with the cultural and artistic traditions flourishing in the region in the premodern

era.

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[56] William Lyster, "Reshaping a Lost Tradition," in *The Cave Church of Paul the Hermit at the Monastery of St. Paul, Egypt*, ed. William Lyster (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 268-271.

[57] In the second half of the thirteenth century, when the Seljuks went into decline, a number of principalities (beyliks) governed by Beys (for chieftain) came into being in Western Anatolia. Interestingly, one of these was the Ottoman principality which later on unified Anatolia and the Balkans to form the Ottoman Empire. For details see Halil Inalcik, "The Emergence of the Ottomans," in *The Cambridge History of Islam,* eds. P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 263-92, doi.10.1017/CHOL9780521219464.010.
The Mamluks were a Muslim dynasty (1250-1517) based in Egypt with provinces consisting of Syria, Palestine and much of the Arabian peninsula. During their rule Cairo was a large metropolitan city and the intellectual capital where people from many lands came to learn and work or be trained as religious and legal leaders. For a comprehensive understanding of Mamluk legacy of art and architecture see Oleg Grabar, "Reflection on Mamluk Art," *Muqarnas* 2, *The Art of the Mamluks* (Brill, 1984):1-12, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1523051.

[58] Zuzana Skalova, "Icons from the Ottoman Era (1517-1798)," in *Icons of the Nile Valley*, by Gawdat Gabra & Zuzana Skalova (Giza: Egyptian International Publishing, 2003), 133-34.

Visual Connections – Akhmim Icons and Keir Drawings

A stylistic analysis of the Keir folio shows that it shares similarities with the Akhmim style which appeared in late seventeenth-eighteenth century in the town of Akhmim and its surrounding areas located in Upper Egypt. [59] However, a more precise determination of the style of the Keir folio and its time period can only happen in conjunction with other approaches which may include a scientific analysis of the fragment's material which is paper. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of the Akhmim style's development and its inspirations can help to determine if this style was a completely new development or if it was an example of rejuvenation and revival of older motifs and visuals in the Coptic artistic cycle. The Akhmim style is encountered in ciboria, triptychs and flat icons in the Akhmim area which is home to several monasteries including the White Monastery and the Red Monastery. [60] Scholars have generally described this style as consisting of flat, two-dimensional figures with disproportionate bodies. Large sized heads feature wide-open almond-shaped eyes and, at times, Arabic and Roman Catholic elements such as Arabized clothing and rosaries.[61] Some of these characteristics are apparent in the Keir folio line drawings where the figures are flat and show no modelling.

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[59] Akhmim is a major city in the province of Suhaj in Upper Egypt about 250 miles south of Cairo. It is situated on the right bank of the Nile. In the Byzantine period this city was known as Panopolis. The name Akhmim is an Arabized version of the pharaonic name Chemmis. Al-Maqrizi, a fifteenth century Muslim historian mentions Akhmim with reference to the monasteries that existed in the area. There are still some monasteries to be found here. For details see Rene-Georges Coquin, "Akhmim," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia, Volume I*, (Claremont Graduate University, School of Religion: McMillan, 1991), accessed 09/17/2019, http://ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/cce/id/93/rec/1.

[60] Zuzana Skalova, "Toward an Understanding of the 'Akhmim Style' Icons and Ciboria," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt – Vol 1 – Akhmim and Sohag*, ed. Gawdat Gabra & Hany N. Takla (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 269.

[61] Helene Moussa, "Icon of St.Mena, St. Mark's Coptic Museum: Akhmim Style?" *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies,* 3-4 (2012): 108.

The heads are large in comparison to the rest of the body and feature big almond-shaped eyes dominating the entire face.

Several icon paintings found in situ in the churches and monasteries of the Akhmim area provide a good visual reference point for the Keir folio drawings. Two icon paintings featuring Archangel Michael, from the Akhmim area, located in the Church of Saint Cyprian/Justina and in the Monastery of Saint Thomas the Hermit, provide compelling evidence of the iconographical and stylistic similarities with the Keir archangel (Fig. 17 & 19). The clothing, the posture, the facial attributes and the calm demeanor of the figure are easily recognizable. The figure has an oval shaped halo and wears a long robe and a skull cap. Striped wings frame the archangel. The facial features are strongly outlined with prominent eyebrows, large expressive eyes and a small mouth. This stylistic affinity raises the possibility that the Keir artist may have been influenced by the workshops or monasteries producing Akhmim style art. A similar visual can be seen in an icon painting of Archangel Michael, in the Christian and Byzantium Museum in Athens which has been dated in the museum records to the seventeenth century (Fig.18). Moreover, an icon of Jesus entering the city of Jerusalem, found in the Coptic Museum, is another painting of labelled by the museum as Akhmim style, that is remarkable for the visual similarity with Saint George drawing in the Keir folio (Fig.26). A haloed Jesus with the recognizable accentuated features sits upright in a frontal pose as he holds the bridle of the donkey in his left hand and rides into the city. His cape billows behind him as people with skull caps and halos crowd around. As stated earlier, the visual coherence of the Keir folio with this style is tangible but to make a conclusive determination of the style and the time period of its

production, would require extensive art historical evidence and further technical analysis of the ink and paper of the Keir fragment.

Development of the Akhmim Style

The Akhmim style emerged in the late seventeenth century as part of the resurgence of Coptic art resulting from renovation activities in churches and the activities of Catholic missionaries in the decorations program of the churches. The restoration of churches was a direct result of the increasing influence wielded by Christian Europe and the Vatican as protectors of Christian sites and the benevolent attitude of the Ottoman rulers towards their Coptic Christian subjects. This resurgence was fueled by the increased activity in the restoration and renovation of Coptic churches. Jesuits and other Catholic missionaries, establishing themselves in Upper Egypt with the objective of converting Copts to Catholicism, offered their services to help with the decoration program of the revitalized churches.[62] The conversion of the Copts to Catholicism (Uniate movement) did not imply that they had to give up their traditions, language, or their icons.[63] One example of the restoration work serving to trigger the artistic activities is the eighteenth-century repair and enlargement of the Monastery of St. Paul near the Red Sea. The monks in the monastery were charged with the task of painting the new and empty walls with a visual program of sacred narratives. This challenge was taken up by an anonymous monk who was not a trained painter. Applying his theological and scriptural knowledge, this self-taught artist was able to decorate the walls of the monastery with a complete decorative program

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[62] Fr. Bigoul al-Suriany, "Coptic Art during the Ottoman Period," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt – Vol 1 – Akhmim and Sohag*, ed. Gawdat Gabra & Hany N. Takla (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 282-285.

[63] Zuzana Skalova, "Icons from the Ottoman Era (1517-1798)," in *Icons of the Nile Valley*, by Gawdat Gabra & Zuzana Skalova (Giza: Egyptian International Publishing, 2003), 121.

featuring saintly figures and narratives. The resulting murals containing figures with wide and

intense gazes reflect a basic popular art which is nevertheless mesmerizing.[64]

Another trigger for the cultural and artistic revival among Copts was the role of the

archons (Coptic business and political leaders) who provided financial resources. They

commissioned paintings and icons not only for the church but also for their homes resulting in

the creation of guild houses and workshops manned by trained laity.[65] Though illustrated

manuscripts had been produced for centuries in the scriptoria of the monasteries, it is likely that

such manuscripts also began to be commissioned for private use. It can be hypothesized that the

Keir folio could have been a product of this environment where artistic resurgence was driving

religiosity. The increased fervor could account for the creation of portable objects of devotion

and veneration. The Akhmim style first became apparent in Gospel manuscripts and continued to

appear in various formats till the end of the nineteenth century. It was propagated by a number

of workshops and artists following in the footsteps of Mattary and Father Abdul Shaheed. [66] A

whole repertory of art was produced which included icons, ciboria, mural paintings, illustrated

manuscripts, embroidered textiles and woodwork in the form of screens, partitions, icon frames

and reliquaries.[67] The Keir folio's imagery and the narratives associated with it, make it a

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[64] M.J. Madsen-Hernandez, "A Survey of the History of Coptic Paintings and Icons with an Emphasis on the Early Modern Period and the Development of Neo-Coptic Art," *Coptica: Journal of the Saint Mark Foundation and Saint Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society* 13, (2014): 84-85.
[65] M.J. Madsen-Hernandez, "A Survey of the History of Coptic Paintings and Icons with an Emphasis on the Early Modern Period and the Development of Neo-Coptic Art," *Coptica: Journal of the Saint Mark Foundation and Saint Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society* 13, (2014): 82.
[66] Fr. Bigoul al-Suriany, "Coptic Art during the Ottoman Period," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt – Vol 1 – Akhmim and Sohag*, ed. Gawdat Gabra & Hany N. Takla (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 282-285.
[67] Zuzana Skalova, "Toward an Understanding of the 'Akhmim Style' Icons and Ciboria," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt – Vol 1 – Akhmim and Sohag*, ed. Gawdat Gabra & Hany N. Takla (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 272.

valuable possession and would have served to engender pious devotions towards the saintly figures portrayed.

Akhmim Style – Inspirations and Influences

Was the Akhmim style a revival of an older pictorial repertoire or was it a completely new phenomenon? The question is relevant as we try to understand the inspirations and influences that played upon it. However, the discussion that unfolds here is in no way conclusive but is an attempt to bring together knowledge which may lead in the future to a deeper analysis resulting in greater insights.

The Akhmimic style was considered an innovation in Coptic art and scholars have attempted to highlight the inspirations and influences it drew from. Attributions range from the artistic practices of the Holy Land workshops to European and Armenian illustrated and printed bibles. Fr. Bigoul al-Suriany concludes that this was a creation of the Catholic missionaries participating in church restorations. The revival of Coptic art resulting from this renovation activity led to the evolution of the Akhmimic style which he correlates with the emergence of the Mozarabic[68] style of the Iberian Peninsula. [69] The Akhmim style has also been hailed as a "unique Egyptian style"[70] showcasing the monks, the saints and martyrs with simple figures and serene faces devoid of any representation of the sufferings endured by the saintly figures. Besides the absence of violence and emotion, the Akhmim style figures can be distinguished

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[68] Mozarabs were Christians living in the Iberian Peninsula under the rule of the Arabs who continued to practice their Christian faith and religious rituals. However, the pervasive Islamic culture influenced their art which became a blend, adopting many Islamic motifs and forms. https://www.britannica.com/art/Mozarabic-art

[69] Fr. Bigoul al-Suriany, "Coptic Art during the Ottoman Period," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt – Vol 1 – Akhmim and Sohag*, ed. Gawdat Gabra & Hany N. Takla (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 299.

[70] Nabil Selim Atalla, *Coptic Icons I* (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock, 1998), 70.

from others by the head covering in the form of a skull cap. Christ, angels and male saints wear red ones, the bishops wear black ones and the officiating priests wear a yellow skull cap as part of their sacred garments.[71] It is also possible that the artists were looking back nostalgically on the figurative imagery from Coptic art of earlier centuries as preserved in the monastic murals and textual documents. This theory finds some support in a fragment of a mural painting discovered at the Bawit Monastery[72] portraying the head of a female with almond shaped eyes and pronounced arched eyebrows (Fig.27). The facial features including the outline of the nose and the mouth appear similar to the Keir folio figures. Another example is a manuscript fragment from Late Antiquity found in the collections of the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin (Fig.28). The drawings of two angels on this fragment compare well with the Keir folio drawing of the archangel in the depiction of the facial characteristics, the long robes and the head covering along with the halo. However, the bodies are well proportioned and normal in contrast to the Keir folio figure with its large head. Perhaps, the large head and expressive eyes were a later development, symbolic of the spiritual power and indicate the importance of the object for the possessor.

The drawings of the fragment provide many indications of its symbolic importance to the owner. The saintly figures depicted on the folio are widely regarded in Coptic Christianity as

[71] Zuzana Skalova, "Toward an Understanding of the 'Akhmim Style' Icons and Ciboria," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt – Vol 1 – Akhmim and Sohag*, ed. Gawdat Gabra & Hany N. Takla (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 276.

[72] Saint Apollo or Apa Apollo founded the Bawit Monastery in the fourth century AD in the Egyptian desert along the fringes of the fertile Nile Valley. The monastery declined in the tenth century and remained shrouded under the sands till the advent of the twentieth century, when it was discovered and excavated. between 1901 and 1913 under the aegis of the French Institute in Cairo. Along with two churches, residential buildings and oratories containing mural paintings were also unearthed.   Inscriptions found on site reveal that Apa Apollo was honored with various epithets such as "friend of the Angel", "saint of the Archangel" and "equal to the angels."

protectors and intercessors. For the Copts they channel spirituality to become the communicators between God and humankind. The recurring theme of good versus evil depicted through the imagery of the spear and the serpent-dragon, manifests the Copts' concern for and engagement with this primeval struggle. The desire to be safeguarded from evil would have inspired them to acquire and surround themselves with objects and motifs serving as emblems of power and protection such as a prayer leaf with sacred figures and inscriptions. In addition, the narratives, the iconographic elements and the style itself, a result of the resurgence of religious activities, ground the fragment within the religiosity of Coptic Christianity. For the owner it would have served as an embodiment of sacred qualities to be used as a personal icon and an object of devotion.

CHAPTER 4

KEIR FOLIO – INSCRIPTIONS

Nature and Content

The inscriptions in the fragment, constituting half of the surface area on the recto and verso sides of the Keir folio, add another layer of meaning by which to understand the fragment's origin and purpose. Therefore, it becomes vital to translate the text in order to understand the nature of the inscriptions and their content and determine if the text and the illustrations are connected meaningfully. Translation of the inscriptions based on Coptic prayer texts accessed online, and confirmed in a nineteenth-century manuscript, reveals the theological and devotional nature of the text consisting of known Coptic prayers. These prayers and invocations to Christ and the Virgin Mary, comprised of passages from the psalms and the Gospel, are categorized within the *Agpeya* (Coptic book of hours). Moreover, Since the script is multilingual, consisting primarily of Arabic with two lines of Coptic appearing on the verso side, yet another layer of analysis is required to determine if the two scripts belong together and to see how they are interconnected. A translation of the prayers that appear in the Keir folio are presented here for context.

Keir Folio verso (section 1)

> "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word
> For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
> which thou hast prepared before the face of all people
> A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel"[73]

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[73] "Sunday Theotokia," (Hymn to the Virgin for every day of the week). accessed on October 31, 2019, http://e.copticbook.net/ebooks/psalmody.php?f=0302#.

Keir Folio verso (section 2)

> Hail to you Mary, the beautiful dove,
> who gave birth, to God the Word…[74]

Keir Folio recto

> "As the Judge is present, take heed, O my soul, awake and consider that awesome
> hour; for in the day of judgment, there will be no mercy on those who were not
> merciful. Therefore, have compassion on me, O Savior, for You alone are the
> Lover of mankind."

> "O the reasonable gate of life, the honored Theotokos,….."[75]

The significant figures illustrated in the Keir folio point to its function as a prayer leaf

which is further confirmed by the content of the inscriptions that comprise an essential part of

Coptic piety and daily prayers.

Coptic Piety and the Agpeya

For the Copts, the tradition of personal piety is centered in the *Agpeya* which is the

monastic *Prayer Book of the Seven Canonical Hours.*[76] The *Agpeya* comprises psalms and

gospels from the Old and New Testament which are recited by Coptic Christian individuals and

monks at the seven canonical hours of the day relating to the various events in the life of Jesus

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[74] "Sunday Theotokia," accessed on October 31, 2019, http://e.copticbook.net/ebooks/psalmody.php?f=0302#.

[75] "Agbeya – Coptic Orthodox Prayer Book – Midnight," St-Takla Coptic Orthodox Church Heritage, accessed October 31, 2019, https://st-takla.org/Agpeya/Agbeya_Midnight.html.

[76] The canonical hours of prayer, beginning at dawn and continuing at regular intervals throughout the day, are *Prime* (Prayer of the First Hour and Morning Prayer, *Terce* (Third Hour), *Sext* (Sixth Hour), *None* (Ninth Hour), *Vespers* (the Prayer of the Eleventh Hour or the Sunset Prayer), *Compline* (Twelfth Hour), and the *Midnight Prayer.* Gawdat Gabra and Tim Vivian, *Coptic Monasteries-Egypt's Monastic Art and Architecture* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 8.

Christ. [77] The cycle of prayers concludes at night with the *Midnight Praise* also known as

Psalmody[78] or *Tasbeha* (Arabic word for "praise"). Manuscripts in museum collections, dating to

different time periods, are examples of the strong tradition prevailing in Coptic Christianity of

engaging with their faith through Gospel readings and prayers of the hours. An illustrated Arabic

Gospel book from thirteenth century (Fig.29) and a bilingual illustrated book of hours with

drawings of equestrian saints from eighteenth century (Fig.13) attest to the continuity of the

tradition of personal devotions through the centuries.[79] A nineteenth century copy of a

manuscript of devotions, *Matla' al-Najat* (Towards salvation through fervent prayer) written by

Butrus al-Sadamanti (lived in 13th century) named as *anba* (bishop) and *qiddis* (saint) is in the

collection of the American University in Cairo. The intensely personal and mystical work is a

reflection on how prayers can pave the way for communion with God.[80] The powerful images

and prayers concentrated within the Keir folio align with this tradition of personal engagement in

profound prayers.

Inscription (Archangel Michael) - Visual Analysis

A visual analysis of the text field on the verso side reveals that the scribe used different

fonts and scripts to write out the prayer extracts. Some scribbled text can be seen overflowing

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[77] Edward I. Rizkalla, *The Coptic Text of the Prayer Book of the Hours of the Coptic Orthodox Church* (Xulon Press Christian Publishing, June 2017).

[78] The Psalmody is the book containing the prayers of the praises and it comprises an annual psalmody and the Kiahk psalmody. The prayers are divided into various sections based on their specific functions such as *Hoos* (Coptic: praise), *Psali* (Greek: chanting), *Lobsh* (Greek: explanation), *Doxology* (Greek: Glorification by word), *Theotokia* Greek: Glorification to the mother of God), *Defnar* (Greek: A brief history).For details see "Midnight Praises," Saint Mina's Coptic Orthodox Church-holmdel, accessed August 27, 2019, https://www.saintmina-holmdel.org/phocadownload/Servants/2018/Midnight%20Praises.pdf.

[79] Bronwyn Dorhofer, "Coptic Prayer Book Leaves: Overview of Text Exhibit Catalogue" (2012). Gift of the Word. 7. https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/giftoftheword/7

[80] "Towards Salvation through Fervent Prayer," World Digital Library, accessed September 27, 2019, https://www.wdl.org/en/item/11357/#q=coptic+manuscripts.

onto the side with the illustration of Archangel Michael. The main textual body consists of a single column with eight visible lines. Remnants of a few characters below the last visible line confirm that more lines were inscribed that have been effaced due to the damage the fragment has suffered. The main text is comprised of two sections and each section starts with a line written in Coptic script. (Fig.30) The area with the illustration has additional text in Arabic appearing at the top and the bottom. The text at the top of the page identifies the figure of the archangel while the text at the bottom of the page is faded and illegible except for a few words that are legible and can be deciphered as "Israel" and "al shakal" (the face of) appearing once and the word "as-salaam" (peace) written multiple times (Fig. 31). The entire text is written with even and rounded characters except for the introductory line above the main body of the text which is written in large font with angular characters. A basic translation of this introductory line reveals it to be an invocation to Christ as the sacred word of God. For Coptic Christians who follow the monophysite doctrine (belief that Jesus Christ had only one divine nature) it is an essential belief to affirm Christ as the eternal word of God that took on human form. [81] And it is this affirmation which is displayed in the folio in prominent characters.

The two different calligraphic styles so clearly visible in the fragment raise the possibility that there were two different hands at work. The impeccable flow of the script in the main body with its neatly spaced words and carefully aligned lines appear in conformity with examples of

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[81] During the 4th and the 5th centuries a theological debate arose in Egypt on the two natures of Christ; the Council of Chalcedon deliberated on the issue and affirmed that Jesus Christ was both divine and human. The monophysite doctrine which was in opposition to this was ascribed to by the Copts and other groups. They believed in the "one incarnate nature of the Word" of God which means that Christ's humanity and his divinity were equally present through the incarnation in one single nature as the Word made flesh. "Coptic-Orthodox Church of Alexandria," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed Aug 31, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Coptic-Orthodox-Church-of-Alexandria.

illustrated manuscripts which have been produced in the scriptoria of the churches, libraries and monasteries. However, as noted, there is a stark contrast between this script and the enlarged angular characters and scribbles on the top where an unstable and less disciplined hand was at work.

Inscription (Archangel Michael) - Translation

The inscriptions on the Archangel Michael folio specifically contain two excerpts from the late night prayer of the book of hours (Agpeya). The first section, an incipit from the Gospel of Luke (2:29:32) contains the "Song of Simeon," also known as "Nunc Dimittis" (Now you dismiss)[82] which reads as follows:

> "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word
> For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
> which thou hast prepared before the face of all people
> A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Fig.32 & 33)

Referring to the historical figure of Saint Simeon to whom an angel had promised that he would not die till he had seen the face of Jesus, the lines inscribed on the folio express Saint Simeon's wish to depart from the world, fulfilled and at peace on seeing the face of baby Jesus, the Lord and Savior. Gospels and psalms were an integral part of the religious life and, therefore, to copy specific sections that talk about salvation and departing the world in peace, points to a conscious and intentional preference for these concerns. Perhaps the lines were especially meaningful and therefore chosen to be written out.

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[82] The "Song of Simeon" is a hymn which was sung by Simeon when he saw baby Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem where Mary and Joseph had brought him for the rite of purification. An angel had told Simeon that he would not die till he had seen the Messiah. In the temple Simeon recognized baby Jesus as the Messiah and taking him in his arms uttered the verse which is also known as "Nunc Dimittis" (translation: Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised). "Nunc-Dimittis," Encyclopedia Brittanica, accessed Sep 20, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nunc-Dimittis.

The second section of the folio, also beginning with a line in Coptic, is the beginning part of the prayer which follows the Gospel of Luke verse recounting the story of Saint Simeon. It is also customarily found in the *Book of Psalmodia* [83]as "Shere ne Maria." Since Psalms comprise an important part of the Coptic prayer rituals, they are used frequently in hymns, as responsories (anthem song) or as part of a meditation.[84] Also sung as part of the midnight praises and in the evening Mass, the lines inscribed on the Archangel Michael folio are only an excerpt from the psalm. This particular excerpt calls out to the exalted personality of Virgin Mary who figures in Coptic religious piety as a powerful intercessor:

> Hail to you Mary, the beautiful dove,
> who gave birth, to God the Word… (Fig.34)

Inscription (Archangel Michael) - Coptic-Arabic

The Coptic script runs parallel with the Arabic script in the main body of the text and initially I had questioned if the two were connected. However, the translation of the Coptic and Arabic script confirms that the two are connected and express similar ideas. The multilingual aspect of the Keir folio inscriptions identifies them as Copto-Arabic alluding to the historical transition from purely Coptic language texts to the hybrid versions during the Arabization of Egypt.[85] The arrival of the Arabs in the seventh century changed the dynamics in all spheres of activity and impacted the communities living in Egypt. As the language of the conquerors, Arabic superseded the traditional languages, eventually reaching the nethermost parts of the

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[83] Hany N. Takla, President St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society, Los Angeles, Email message to author, August 6, 2019.

[84] Fr. Ugo Zanetti, "Liturgy in the White Monastery," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt – Vol 1 – Akhmim and Sohag*, ed. Gawdat Gabra & Hany N. Takla (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 205.

[85] Mark N. Swanson, "Copto-Arabic Literature," in *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*, ed. Gawdat Gabra (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 153-161.

country. Preserved Judaeo-Arabic papyri (Arabic written in the Hebrew script) document the use of Arabic by the Jewish Community from the ninth century.[86] For the Copts in Egypt it became a matter of expediency to acquire fluency in Arabic since jobs in government, commerce, administration and medicine were dependent on the language capability.

In the tenth century, during the rule of the Fatimid Muslim empire in Egypt, the Coptic Christian community felt the need to not only write theological works in Arabic but also translate religious texts from Coptic into Arabic and there was a flowering of Copto-Arabic literature. One well-known theologian Sawirus Ibn al Muqaffa, (died 987 AD) bishop of al-Ashmunayn, is believed to have written twenty and more works in Arabic including the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria: The Copts of Egypt before and after the Islamic Conquests*. He was trained as a scribe (an administrator or a secretary) before he became a monk.[87] Coptic religious texts including the lives of saints were translated into Arabic and the use of Arabic versions of the bible and bible commentaries by Coptic scholars became more common. Eventually, the Coptic Patriarchate based in Cairo and Alexandria encouraged and provided the stimulus towards using both Arabic and the Bohairic Coptic script for the production of religious literature.[88] In the time of the Ayubbids (1169-1250) with increased Copto-Arabic literary production, Gospel books produced in the Northern Bohairic Coptic dialect would contain complementary Arabic

[86] Petra M. Sijpesteijn, "The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Beginning of Muslim Rule." In *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700,* ed. Roger S. Bagnall (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2007), 446, 454, https://www.academia.edu/10486504/The_Arab_Conquest_of_Egypt_and_the_Beginning_of_Muslim_Rule.
[87] Mark N. Swanson, "Copto-Arabic Literature," in *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*, ed. Gawdat Gabra (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 153-161.
[88] Gawdat Gabra and Marianne Eaton-Krauss, *The Treasures of Coptic Art* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 123-129.

texts and illustrations.[89] Examples of colorful and luxuriously illuminated Gospel books and

liturgical manuscripts both in Arabic and Copto-Arabic format are to be found in the manuscript

library of the Coptic museum in Cairo and in Old Cairo's historical churches.[90] The use of the

Coptic language in everyday life waned towards the fourteenth century and its scope became

limited to liturgical use only.[91] The Keir folio, with its dominating Arabic text and a few lines of

Coptic is a testimony of this change as it manifested in the scribal conventions and manuscript

production.

Inscription (Saint George) - Visual Analysis

The organization of the material on the recto side containing the illustration of Saint

George, follows a similar convention as the verso side. A full page drawing of Saint George is

flanked by a full page of inscription written in the familiar rounded characters which are found in

the verso, probably by the same hand. The single columnar text comprises eight lines of which

the last two are barely visible due to a superimposed piece of paper containing a few Coptic

letters in a vertical alignment.

Inscription (Saint George) - Translation

The translation of the Arabic inscription on the Saint George folio indicates that this is an

extract from the concluding prayer of the day in the *Agpeya*. This determination was made by a

direct comparison with an extant Coptic manuscript housed at the Archimandrite Coptic Society

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[89] Lucy-Ann Hunt, "Christian Muslim Relations in painting in Egypt of the twelfth to mid-thirteenth century: sources of wall painting at deir es suriani and the illustrations of the new testament," *Byzantium, Eastern Christendom and Islam* 1, (1998): 216.

[90] Gawdat Gabra and Marianne Eaton-Krauss, *The Treasures of Coptic Art* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 123-129.

[91] Ewa D. Zakrzewska, "The Coptic Language," in *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*, ed. Gawdat Gabra (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 84.

in Los Angeles.[92] The prayer, which occurs at the midnight hour, is concerned primarily with remembrance of the second coming of Christ [93] and the day of final judgement and it is divided into three parts which are known as Watches. The translation of the passage that is included in the prayers of the third watch appears below.

> "As the Judge is present, take heed, O my soul, awake and consider that awesome hour; for in the day of judgment, there will be no mercy on those who were not merciful. Therefore, have compassion on me, O Savior, for You alone are the Lover of mankind."

> "O the reasonable gate of life, the honored Theotokos, deliver from hardships those who, in faith, take refuge in you, so that we might glorify your immaculate birth of Christ for the salvation of our souls."

However, it is noteworthy that the Keir folio inscription is not the whole passage but consists of extracts which the scribe may have selected and transferred onto the folio.(Fig.35) It is also a possibility that, if this was a part of a codex, then the prayer may be incomplete on this page but gets completed on the next page. However, there is no way to be certain about it as it takes us into the area of conjecture. The parts that have been inscribed on the recto refer to the day of judgement as "in the day of judgment, there will be no mercy on those who were not merciful. Therefore, have compassion on me, O Savior, for You alone are the Lover of mankind. O the reasonable gate of life, the honored *Theotokos…*" (the last phrase addresses the Virgin Mary). This concern for salvation and afterlife, apparent in the passage inscribed on the recto side, is

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[92] The manuscript housed at the Archimandrite Coptic Society dates to the 1860s and was written by a monk Youhanna al-Nasikh (scribe) in the Baramous Monastery in Wadi al-Natrun. He later became Pope Cyril V of Alexandria and was also known as Abba Kyrillos V (died 1927). He was the 112th Pope of Alexandria & Patriarch of the See of St. Mark. Hany N. Takla, President St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society, Los Angeles, Email message to author, August 6, 2019.

[93] In Christianity, the future return of Christ in glory, when it is understood that he will set up his kingdom, judge his enemies, and reward the faithful, living and dead. "Second Coming," Encyclopedia Brittanica, accessed October 31, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Second-Coming.

echoed in the story of Saint Simeon who desires nothing but a safe passage into eternity, and also reminds us of the Coptic person's belief in Archangel Michael as a protector and helper especially at the time of death. All these threads coming together in the Keir folio allude to the possibility that they reflected the personal concerns of the owner of the object.

As Coptic Christianity developed and flourished through the centuries, aspects of its religious observances, rituals and prayers also became formalized. Accordingly, the Coptic book of hours, the *Agpeya,* which is the source of the Keir Folio inscriptions, has developed and evolved over a long period of time, resulting in changes to the organization of the material and the prayers. Therefore, when referring to the formulaic prayers, a relevant question would be to determine what version of the prayers was in use at a particular moment in history. Coptic scholar Hany Takla [94] believes that the prayers inscribed on the Keir folio appear to be seventeenth century or later. This is an important point as it ties up with the visual coherence of the illustrations with the seventeenth-eighteenth century Akhmim style figural imagery. This opens up another avenue of inquiry which could study the evolution of the liturgical material of Coptic Christianity over the many centuries of its existence. If the Keir folio had belonged within a codex, such a book would generally have a complete narration of prayers for the devout person to read or recite. However, a close comparison of the St. George folio inscription with the nineteenth-century Copto-Arabic manuscript of the Archimandrite Coptic Society reveals that the inscription contains selected phrases from the entire prayer as if the owner made a deliberate

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[94] Hany Takla – Hany N. Takla, President St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society, Los Angeles, Email message to author, August 6, 2019.

choice on what to include again raising the possibility that it functioned more as a personalized prayer leaf for the owner for whom it may have served an apotropaic function.

Inscriptions (Keir Folio) - Monastic Connections

The monasteries of Egypt not only served as a base for people seeking spirituality in seclusion, but they were also the hub of artistic and literary activities in which monks played an important part. And the question that can be asked is whether the Keir folio was a product of the monastic environment. Certainly, the evidence found within the surviving libraries of the various monastic settlements makes it a possibility which would need further research and inquiry.

Monasticism began in Egypt in the first few centuries with St. Antony who is known as "the father of the monks." [95] Monasteries were a cosmos in themselves with ascetics and monks living prayerful but strictly spartan lives. They often engaged in artistic and literary activities and have left a legacy of Coptic art in the form of murals, frescos and architectural sculptures. The tradition of writing the religious texts - liturgical, theological and ecclesiastical – in Coptic was the innovation of the desert fathers, the pioneer monks who lived this alternative way of life centered on spirituality and salvation in the desert communities they established. The Coptic language became a signifier of the alternative lifestyle, a *symbolic capital* and a prestige factor.[96] Hence monasteries had *scriptoria* which became workshops for manuscript production where the monks worked as scribes.[97] In the Middle Ages and later centuries the manuscripts were written in Arabic as well as Coptic.

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[95] Gawdat Gabra, Marianne Eaton-Krauss, *The Treasures of Coptic Art in the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 53.
[96] Ewa D. Zakrzewska, "The Coptic Language," in *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*, ed. Gawdat Gabra (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 83
[97] Gawdat Gabra, Marianne Eaton-Krauss, *The Treasures of Coptic Art in the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 57.

Archaeological excavations have brought forth material evidence of monastic literary activity in the form of textual material recovered. For example, the excavations at Naqlun[98] unearthed a huge monastic complex consisting of hermitages, libraries, churches and two cemeteries.[99] In the excavations an array of finds intimately connected to the life and activities of the once thriving monastic community, were discovered. These included wall paintings, Abbasid and Fatimid coins of the ninth and tenth centuries, Greek, Coptic and Arabic texts and fragments on papyrus, parchment and paper along with book binding paraphernalia. What is interesting and relevant is the fact that the religious texts recovered consist mostly of private excerpts of prayers, fragments of psalms and literary texts, all of which may have been made and used by the monks as personal and intimate items of devotion.[100] The Keir folios also contain excerpts of prayers; and the informal nature of the drawings and the uneven script with overwriting in a few places, gives credence to the theory that this would be an object that would have had a deep emotional connection with its owner.

Monastic life provided a refuge for people seeking a life of worship, but it did not make them immune to the trials and tribulations of daily life. Scholars have written in detail about the structure and daily activities of these monastic communities where often the monks would remain in seclusion in their cells, only to come together occasionally for the prayer services or for meals.[101] Monastic life had its share of harsh and punishing conditions including spiritual

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[98] Excavations at Naqlun were done by the Polish Center of Mediterranean Archaeology from 1986 onwards
[99] Wlodzimierz Godlewski, "Naqlun: Layout 1," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* (September 2007): 173. https://pcma.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/template/main/img/lat70/book70_15.pdf.
[100] Wlodzimierz Godlewski, "Naqlun: Layout 1," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* (September 2007): 171, 175-76, https://pcma.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/template/main/img/lat70/book70_15.pdf.
[101] Gawdat Gabra, Marianne Eaton-Krauss, *The Treasures of Coptic Art in the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 53.

tribulations, physical ailments and external dangers. Amulets and apotropaic inscriptions on the

walls of monastic cells, have been uncovered in Egypt in the course of excavations. The amulets

with *incipits* of passages from the Bible, usually the opening lines of the four Gospels, were

made and used as a means of protection to ward off evil or misfortunes and for deliverance from

bodily ills and ailments. Though the four Gospels were emphasized, at times other incipits such

as the Psalms were added based on the preference of the scribe or the ritual expert who invoked

the power of the verses to produce the desired result. Evidence from the monasteries suggest that

monks were among those who made and used amulets.[102] Whether the Keir folio is a product of

the monastic environment and whether it ever functioned as an amulet or a talisman opens up a

vast field of inquiry requiring an understanding of the typology of amulets and having to trace

the trajectory of the use of such talismans through the history of Coptic Christianity. It will also

need an inquiry grounded more thoroughly in excavation reports and the recovered artifacts.

Extensive research of the documentary and material evidence has not been attempted here

leaving it as a possibility for future research.

The nature and content of the Keir folio inscriptions, clarified through the translation of

the text, expand our understanding of the fragment: what it is and how it may have been used in

the historical time period in which it was produced. Moreover, the text provides a window into

the historical context of the emergence and proliferation of Copto-Arabic manuscripts. The

inscriptions also provide clues relating to the inspirations and concerns of the producer and user.

Monasteries were the center of artistic and literary production and the monks were involved in

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[102] Joseph E. Sanzo, "Ancient Amulets with Incipits: The Blurred Line between Magic and Religion"*,* Bible
Archaeology Society, accessed August 8, 2019, https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-
artifacts/artifacts-and-the-bible/ancient-amulets-with-incipits/#note02.

these activities. Along with formal manuscripts, fragments of prayers used as personal items

have been recovered through excavations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The discussions set forth in the paper help to conclude that the Keir folio with its saintly drawings and biblical inscriptions is a prayer leaf that was valuable and performed a significant function in the life of its owner. Its survival as a singular piece does not preclude the possibility that it may once have been a part of a manuscript, albeit, an informal one. For the Coptic Christians, the religiosity that the figures of Saint George and Archangel Michael inspire, the roles that define them, and the narratives that they are associated with, make them objects of devotion and power. Hence the Keir folio served its owner as an intimate and highly personalized object of prayers and devotion which carried the imagery of the holy figures associated with apotropaic and healing qualities. The evidence laid out also suggests that the content was carefully chosen and was designed to bring solace and succor in the difficult times of life and possibly to serve beyond into the afterlife. There are enough indications in the drawings, in the inscriptions and in the physical characteristics that help support this idea. The narratives emerging in the illustrations relate to the ideas of the triumph of goodness over evil, intercession between God and mankind and protection from adversities of life and safe passage into eternity. These narratives and the iconographical aspects of the illustrations point to the object's functionality and its value which allowed it to be safeguarded and preserved. The discussion also threw light on the Coptic painting traditions, the iconographical elements that promoted the saintly narratives, and the styles that were in use in the Premodern period, and the artists that propagated the art. Though a more conclusive understanding of the style of the Keir

folio illustrations cannot happen within the limited scope of this paper, the discussion brings

forth analysis that can form the basis for future scholarship.

The translation and analysis of the content of the inscriptions helped to center the

discussion around the literary tradition and the historical context as it related to religious texts

and manuscripts production, and the role of the monasteries in this area of activity. The

inscriptions of the fragment which were derived from the Coptic book of hours added to the

significance of the illustrations and clarified further the origin and purpose of the Keir folio. The

texts contain invocations to Christ and the Virgin Mary and express the owner's concern with his

personal faith and piety. The inscriptions also helped to understand the historical context of

textual material combining Arabic and Coptic, two languages that were important for Coptic

Christians. The nature and content of the Keir folio inscriptions, clarified through the translation

of the text, expand our understanding of the fragment and how it may have been used.

Areas of Further Study

The provenance of the Keir folio and its categorization as a "Fustat Fragment" needs

further attention. My research has brought forth knowledge which suggests, though not

conclusively, that the folio may have a later origin than imagined. Therefore, this categorization

may not hold true even though the excavations at Fustat have resulted in the recovery of objects

dated to as late as the fifteenth century. The ambiguity of the situation is highlighted by a

statement of the scholar Ernst Grube when he wrote in the Keir Catalogue, that the fragment,

"does not strictly speaking belong to the 'Fostat Group'," even though it is grouped under that

label.[103] Do we understand this to mean that though it was found or acquired in Fustat, its portability may suggest a different place of production? Though Grube has passed on, perhaps his family archives may contain documentation that can provide some insight.

With regards to the object itself there are aspects that need to be researched further. For example, the epigraphical analysis helping to interpret the text and make connections with the drawings in meaningful ways is one such area. The drawings and the inscriptions suggest that, for the owner, the Keir folio may have served as an embodiment of the healing and protective qualities that are associated with the saintly figures. But did it ever serve in the context of a formal amulet or a talisman? This is an important question as it relates to the making and use of amulets, not just by ordinary people, but also by monks. Scholars have written about such use in antiquity and late antiquity. But does the trajectory go further into the medieval and the premodern context? The use of amulets in Egypt was not limited to Christianity but was also evident in other faith communities such as among the Muslims. A Fustat fragment (I-38) in the Keir Collection is an amulet with Muslim inscriptions and would have been folded to fit in a locket or carried around. Grube believed that it could originally have been a part of a manuscript but may have changed functionality. It has figurative drawings and the text contained within this piece of paper is a request for heavenly assistance in matters of health and childbirth.[104] The idea of the Keir folio serving as an amulet opens up a vast field of inquiry requiring an understanding of the typology of amulets and, in the monastic context, delving into excavation records of monastic settlements, and a study of the recovered artifacts. Such extensive research of

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[103] Ernst J. Grube, "Fostat Fragments," in *Islamic Painting and the Arts of the Book*, ed. B.W. Robinson (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1976), 63.
[104] Ernst J. Grube, "Fostat Fragments," in *Islamic Painting and the Arts of the Book*, ed. B.W. Robinson (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1976), 63.

documentary and material evidence has not been attempted in this paper, leaving it as a possibility for future research.

　　With regards to the cultural and social milieu of Egypt where the Copts were living as a minority for centuries, it would be interesting to research how the visual cultures of the various faith communities interacted and influenced each other in an environment of cultural exchange and fluidity of artistic programs. This research would inform focus areas such as the influences on Islamic art and architecture and vice versa, and how the iconography changes and acquires new meanings and symbolism. The determination of the style of the Keir folio is an interesting area of inquiry. As brought forth in the discussion of style, the drawings have strong parallels in the Akhmim style icons found in situ in the churches and monasteries around Akhmim and this style is believed to be a late seventeenth-century development. However, this could also be a revival of an older style from earlier centuries. This poses an interesting question on the style as well as the dating of the Keir folio which would require a comprehensive study. Though an attempt has been made to introduce the discussion and provide evidence through visual analysis, it only sets the stage for further deeper investigation.

Fig. 1: Fostat, *Fragment with a drawing of Archangel Michael and Copto-Arabic Inscriptions and A Christian Saint (St. George),* n.d., Paper, 13.34 x 20 cm., Keir Collection of Islamic Art on Loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.
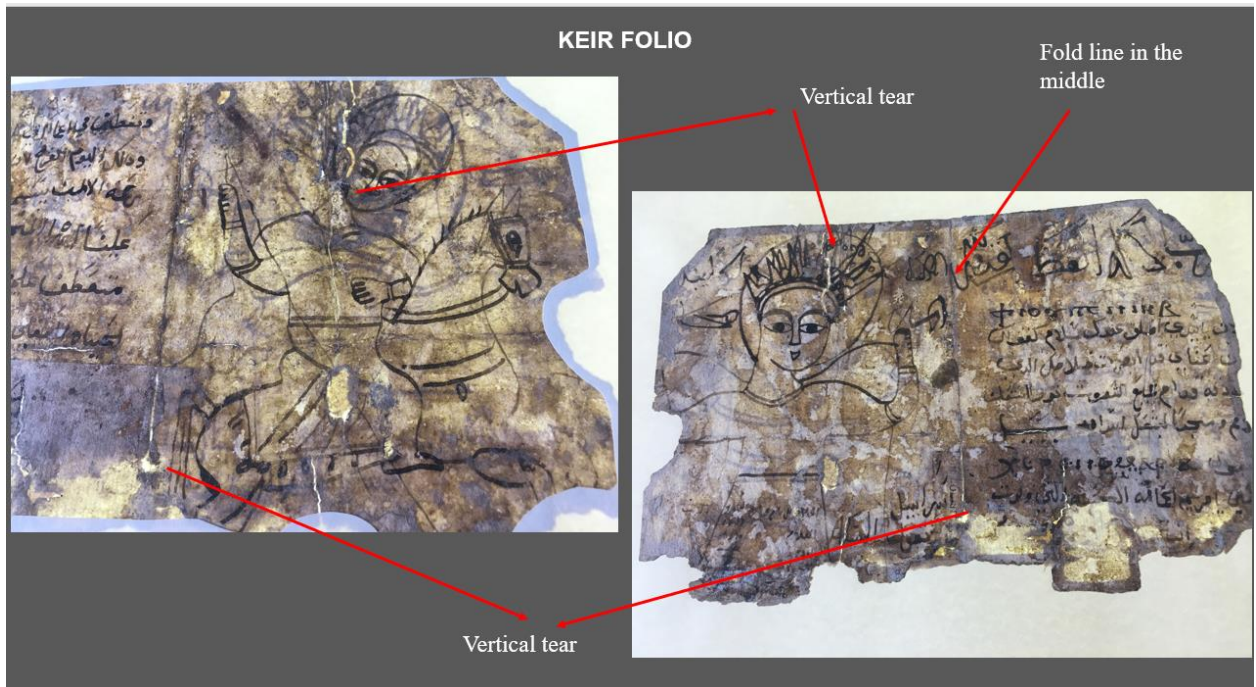
Fig. 2: *Fragment with a drawing of Archangel Michael and Copto-Arabic Inscriptions and A Christian Saint (St. George),* Fostat, n.d., Paper, 13.34 x 20 cm., Keir Collection of Islamic Art on Loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.
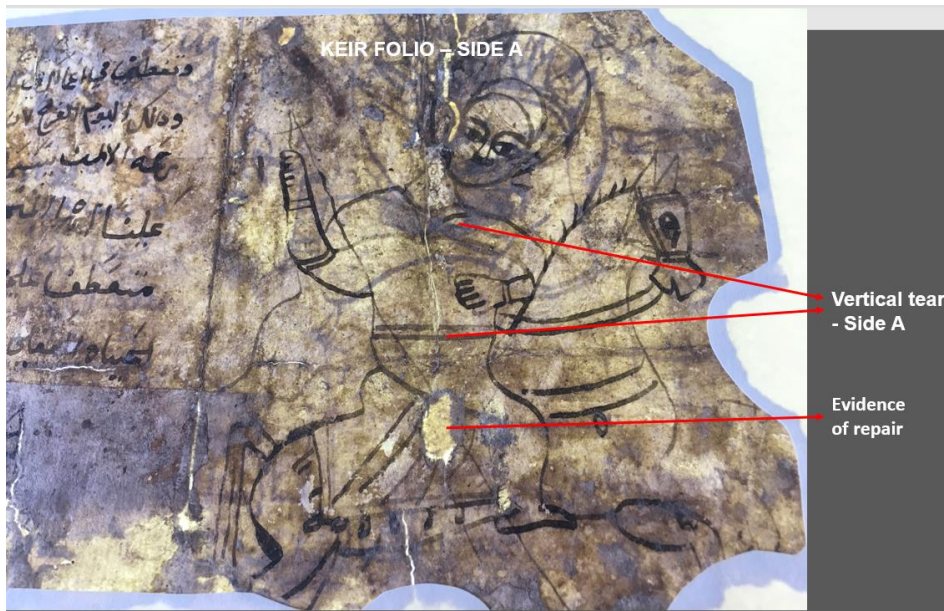
Fig. 3: *Fragment with a drawing of a Christian Saint (St. George),* Fostat, n.d., Paper, 13.34 x 20 cm., Keir Collection of Islamic Art on Loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.
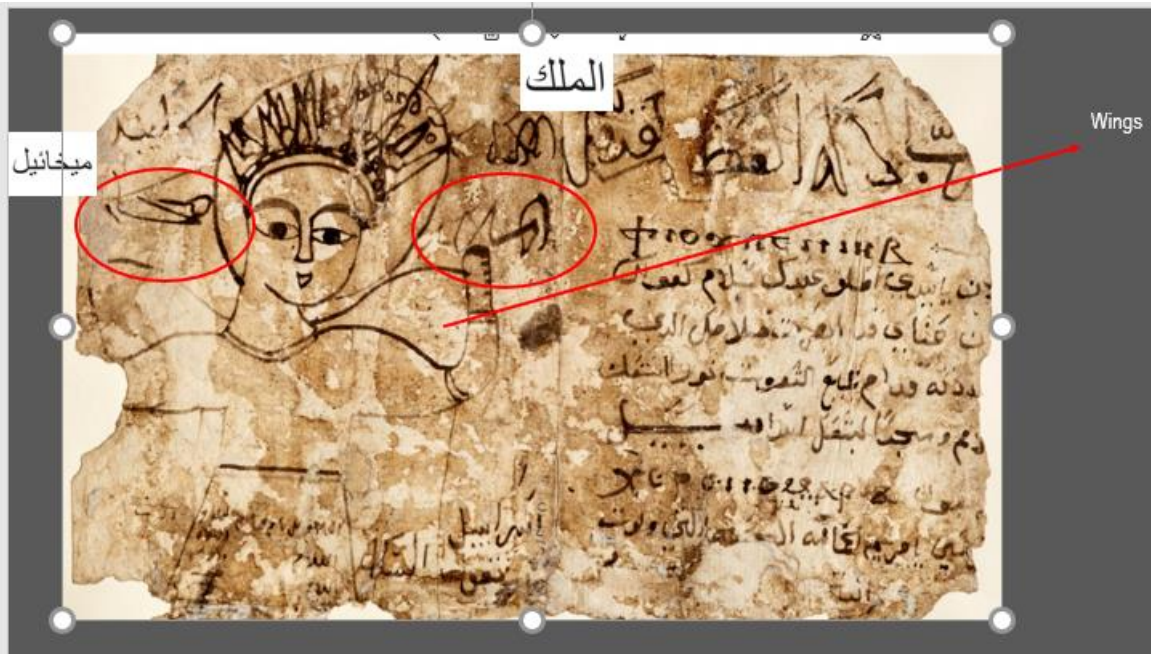
Fig. 4: *Fragment with a drawing of Archangel Michael,* Fostat, n.d., Paper, 13.34 x 20 cm., Keir Collection of Islamic Art on Loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.
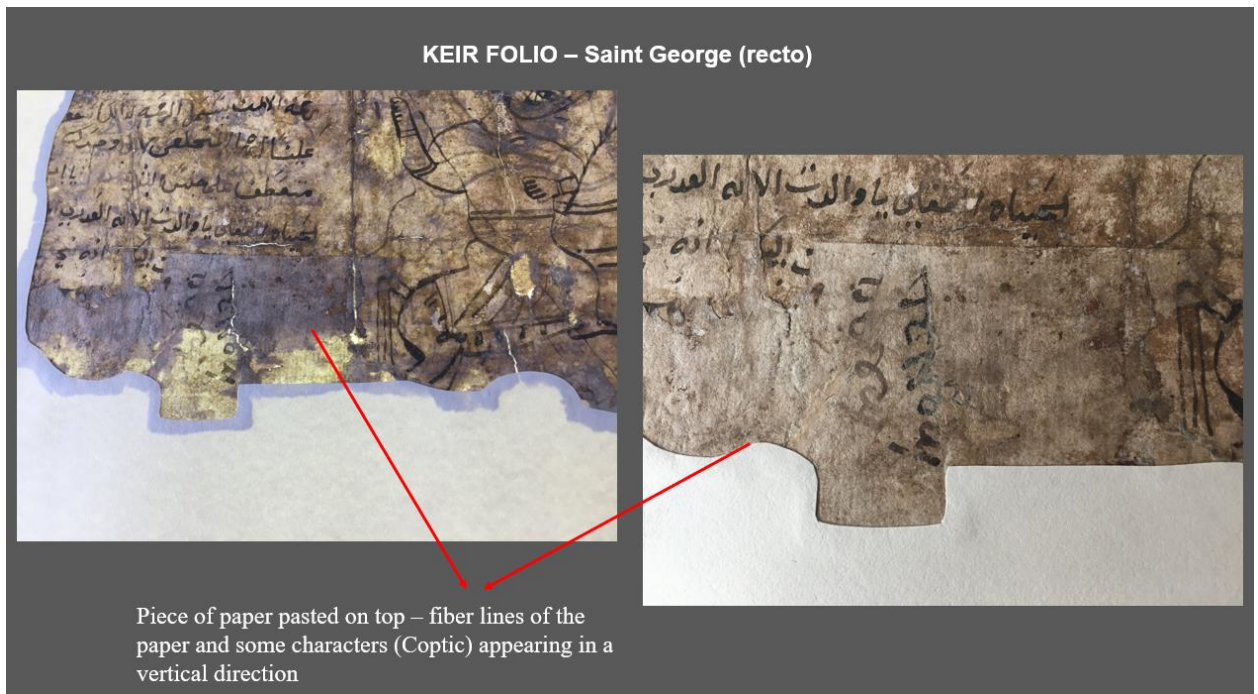
Fig. 5: *Fragment with a drawing of a Christian Saint (St. George),* Fostat, n.d., Paper, 13.34 x 20 cm., Keir Collection of Islamic Art on Loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.

Fig. 6: *Coptic Arabic Manuscript Folio from Coptic Monastery of Saint Paul,* in Nabil Selim Atalla, *Illustrations from Coptic Manuscripts* (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock Publishers, 2000), 157.
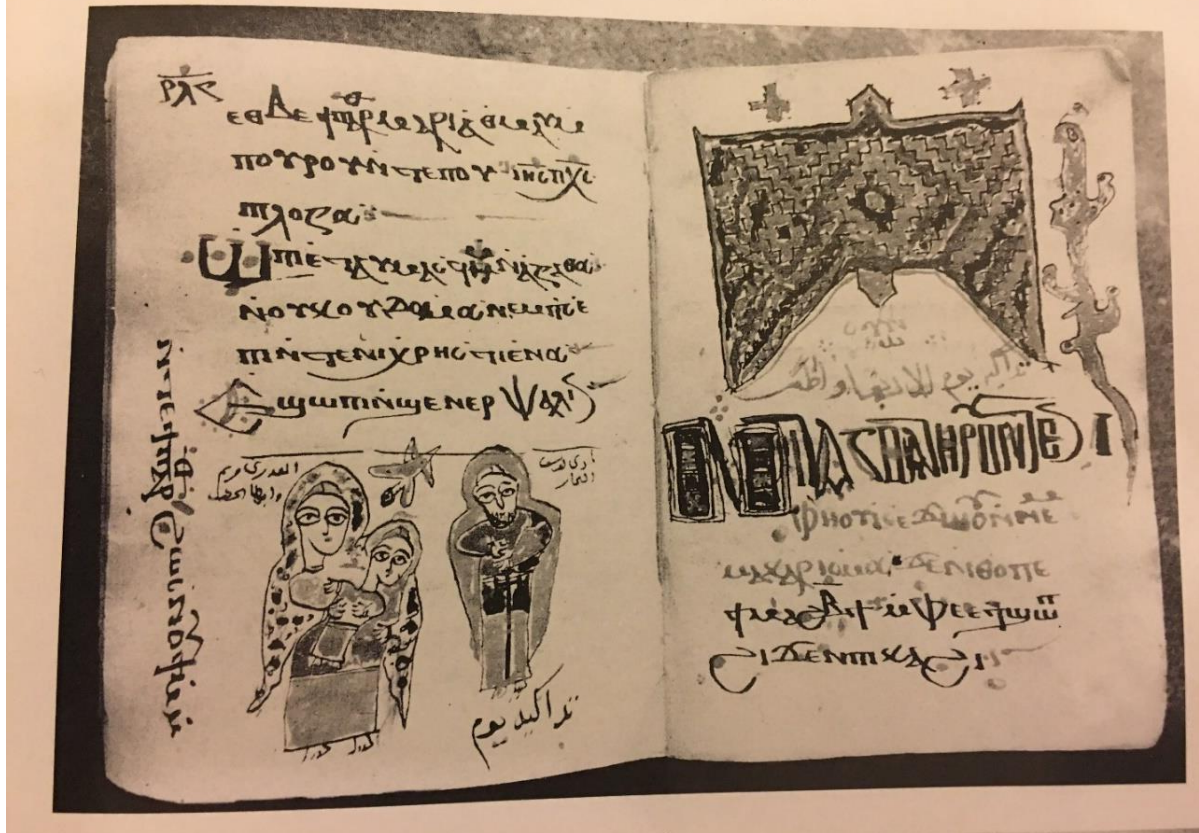
Fig. 7: *Coptic Arabic Manuscript Folio from Coptic Monastery of Saint Paul,* in Nabil Selim Atalla, *Illustrations from Coptic Manuscripts* (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock Publishers, 2000), 157.

Fig. 8: *Fragment with a drawing of a Christian Saint (St. George),* Fostat, n.d., Paper, 13.34 x 20 cm., Keir Collection of Islamic Art on Loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.
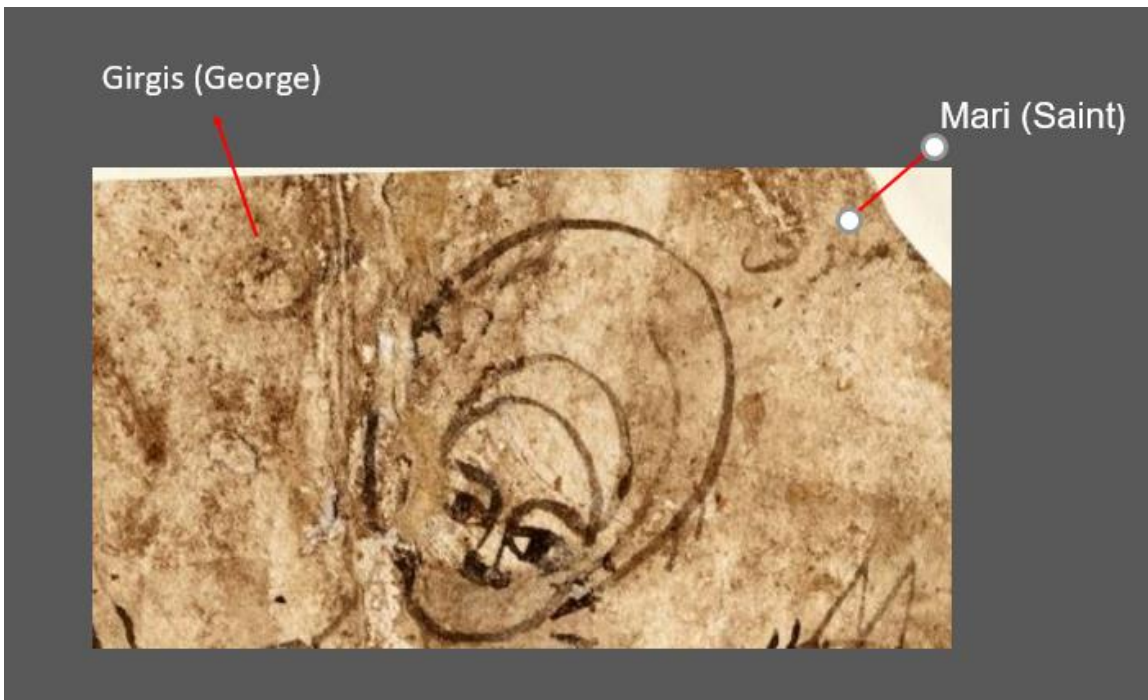
Fig.9: Mari Girgis (Arabic for Saint George)

Fig. 10: Ibrahim al-Nasikh & Yuhanna al-Armani al-Qudsi, *Icon Painting of Saint George*, 18th century CE, in Nabil Selim Atalla, *Coptic Icons I* (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock Publishers, 1998), 81.

Fig. 11: Theodore, *Saint George,* 13th century CE, Wall painting, The Coptic Orthodox Monastery of Saint Antony, Red Sea, Egypt.
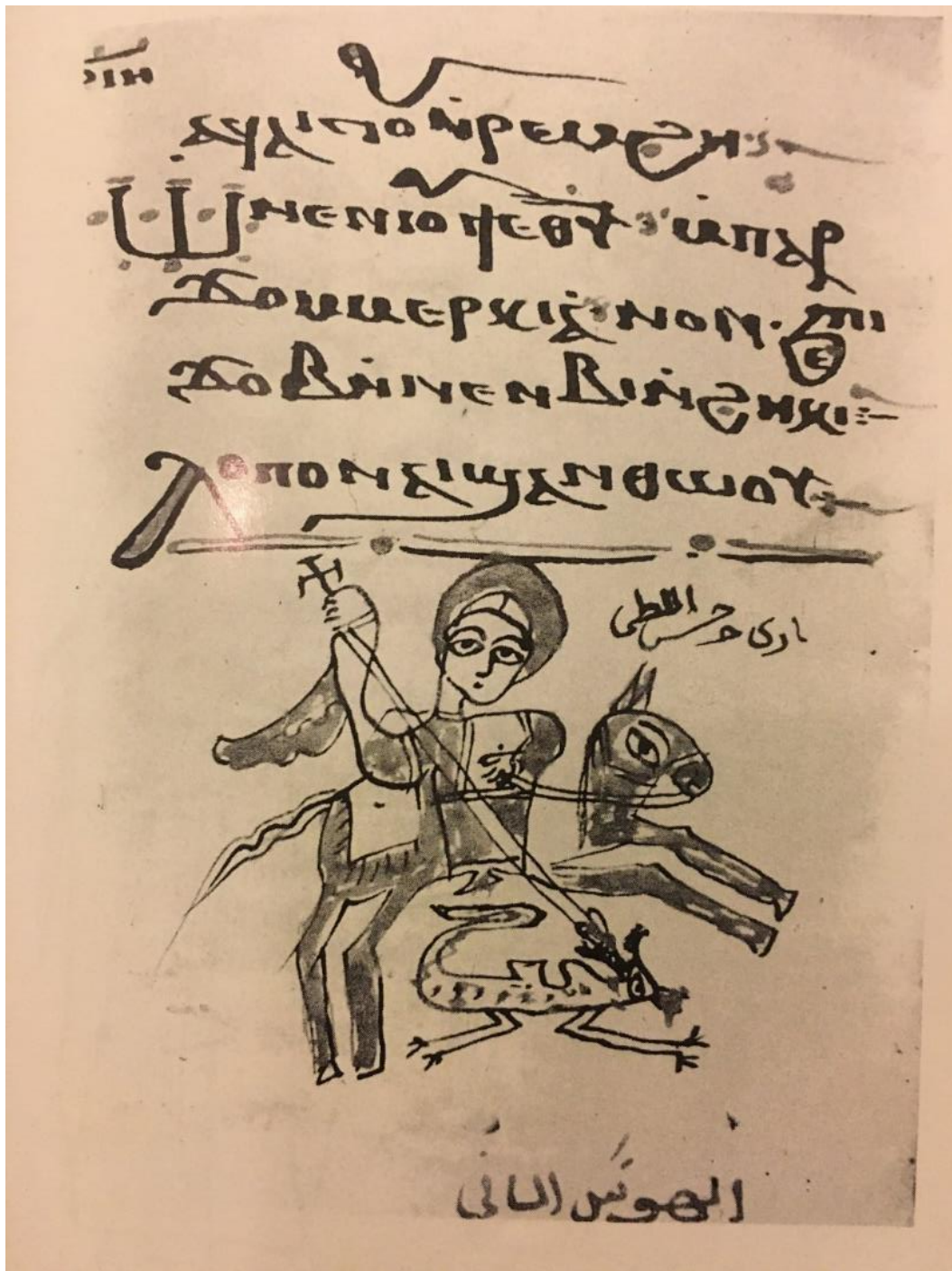
Fig.12: *Coptic Arabic Manuscript Folio from Coptic Monastery of Saint Paul,* in Nabil Selim Atalla, *Illustrations from Coptic Manuscripts* (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock Publishers, 2000), 157.

Saint Theodore the Eastern dethroning the Roman Emperor Diocletian, famed for his intense persecution of Christians, with a cross-topped spear.

Saint Mercurius, also known in Arabic as Abu Sifayn, is recognized by the dual swords he wields overhead, while below, Julian the Apostate lays lifeless beneath the hooves of his mount.

The mounted Saint George is easily identified by the dragon underfoot which he spears with his pike
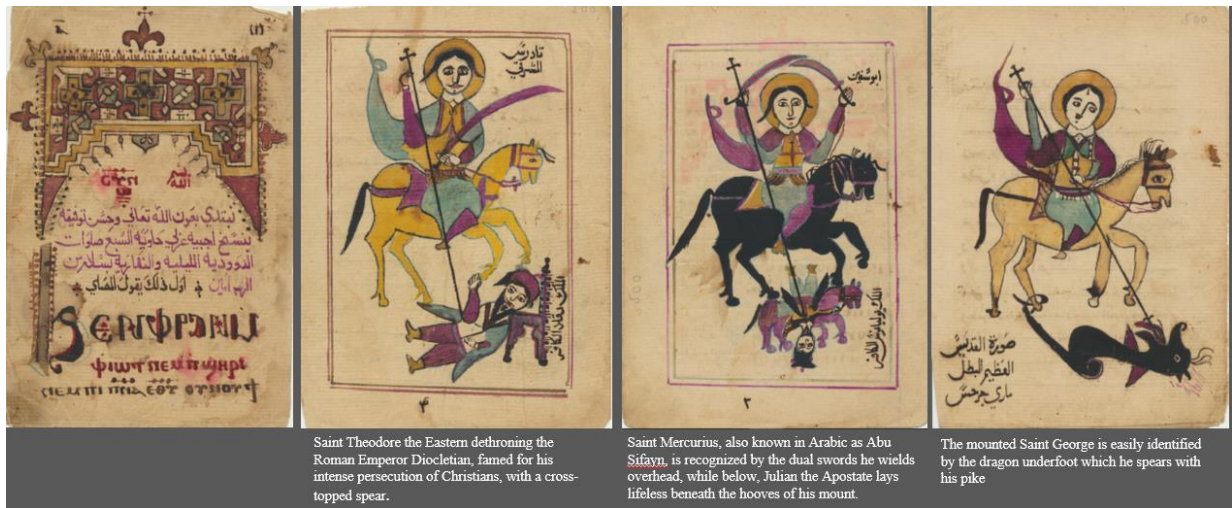
Fig. 13: *Coptic Prayer Book Leaves (Gift of the Word Exhibit Catalogue),* early 18th century CE, Vellum, 19.5 x 13.7 cm. Portland State University Library Special Collections, accessed November 15, 2019, https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/giftoftheword/7.

Fig. 14: Byzantine, Constantinople, *Medallion with Saint George from an icon frame*, ca. 1100, Gold, silver, and enamel worked in cloisonné, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,

Fig. 15: Byzantium, Constantinople, *Icon: Saint Warriors George, Theodore and Demetrius*, Late 11th - early 12th century CE, Tempera on panel, Hermitage Museum, Russia

Fig. 16: *Fragment with a drawing of Archangel Michael and Copto-Arabic inscriptions,* Fostat, n.d., Paper, 13.34 x 20 cm., Keir Collection of Islamic Art on Loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.
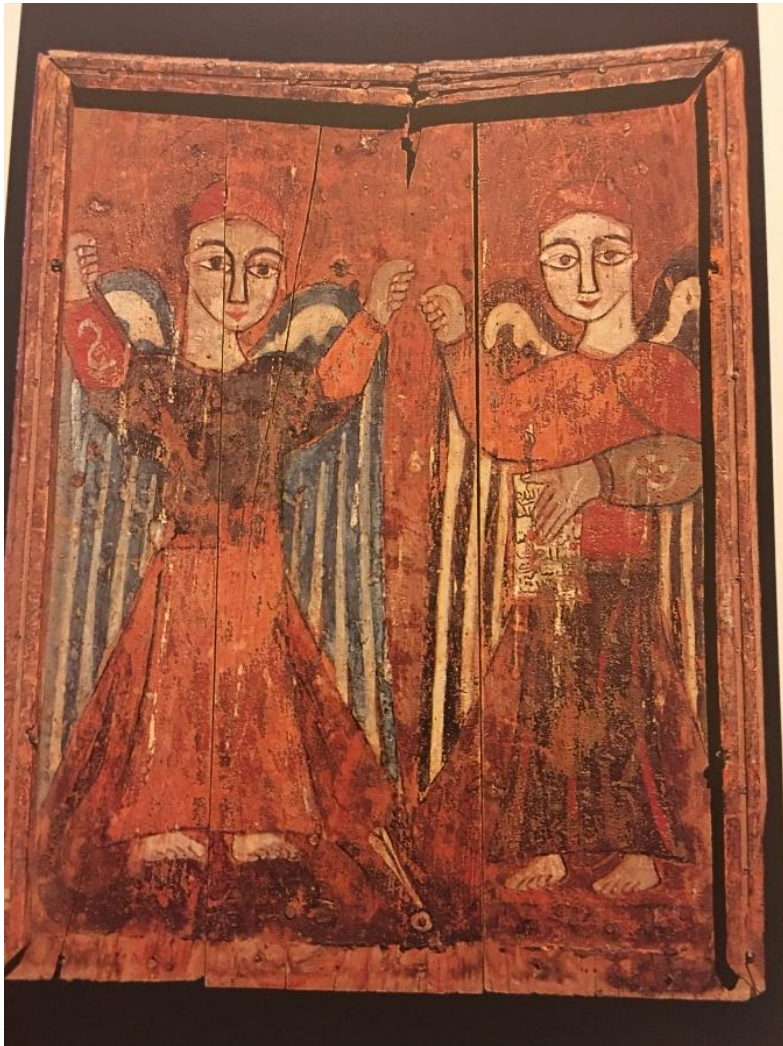
Fig.17: *Icon Painting of Archangels Michael and Gabriel in Church of Saints Cyprian and Justina, El Maraghah, Egypt*, in Nabil Selim Atalla, *Coptic Icons II* (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock Publishers, 1998), 47.

Fig. 18: *Archangel Michael*, 17th century CE, icon painting, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens, Greece

Fig.19: *Triptych representing the Holy Family in the central panel, Archangel Michael (right shutter) and Archangel Gabriel (left shutter) in Coptic Monastery of Saint Thomas the Hermit near Akhmim, Egypt,* in Nabil Selim Atalla, *Coptic Icons I* (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock Publishers, 1998), 65.

Fig. 20: Egypt, *Encomium on St. Michael Archangel*, before Aug 895 CE, vellum, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, accessed November 15, 2019, http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/1/214169

Fig. 21: *Sol Invictus (Invincible Sun)*, Roman Period, relief sculpture, National Museum of Beirut, Lebanon

Fig. 22: Rome, *Vault decoration with Christ/Helios mosaic in tomb of Julii, Vatican City*, 3rd-early 4th century CE, in Margaret E. Frazer, *The Christian Realm-Iconic Representations in Age of Spirituality – Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Princeton University Press, 1979), 522

Fig. 23: Ibrahim al-Nasikh, *Icon Painting of Saint George for the Church of St. John the Dweller in the Desert, Al Damshiriah, Old Cairo*, 1765 AD, in Nabil Selim Atalla, *Coptic Icons I* (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock Publishers, 1998),105.

Fig. 24: Ibrahim al-Nasikh, *Icon with Archangel Michael,* 1777 AD, tempera on wood, 52.2 x 37 cm, in Gawdat & Marianne Eaton-Krauss, *The Illustrated Guide to the Coptic Museum and Churches of Old Cairo* (Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 199.
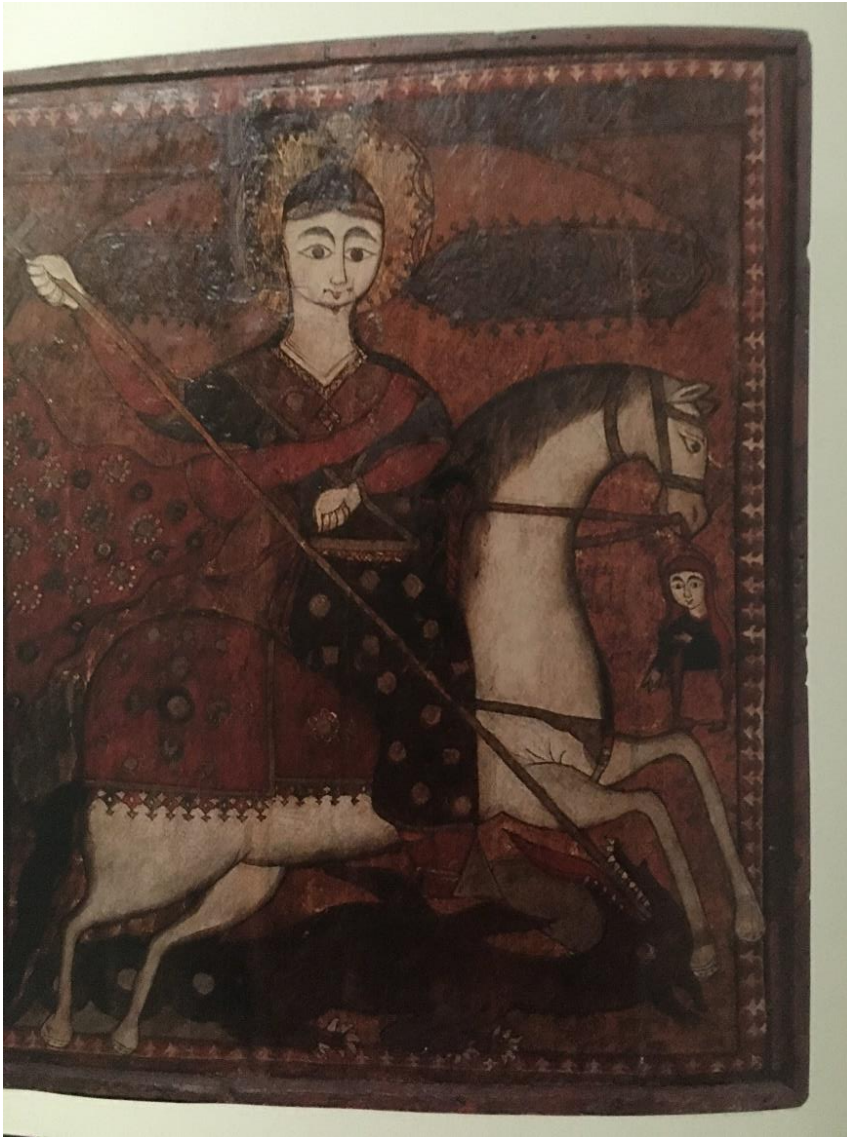
Fig. 25: Mattary, *Saint George in Monastery of St.Mercurius in Old Cairo,* 18th century CE, in
William Lyster, *Reshaping a Lost Tradition in The Cave Church of Paul the Hermit at the
Monastery of St. Paul, Egypt* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 270.
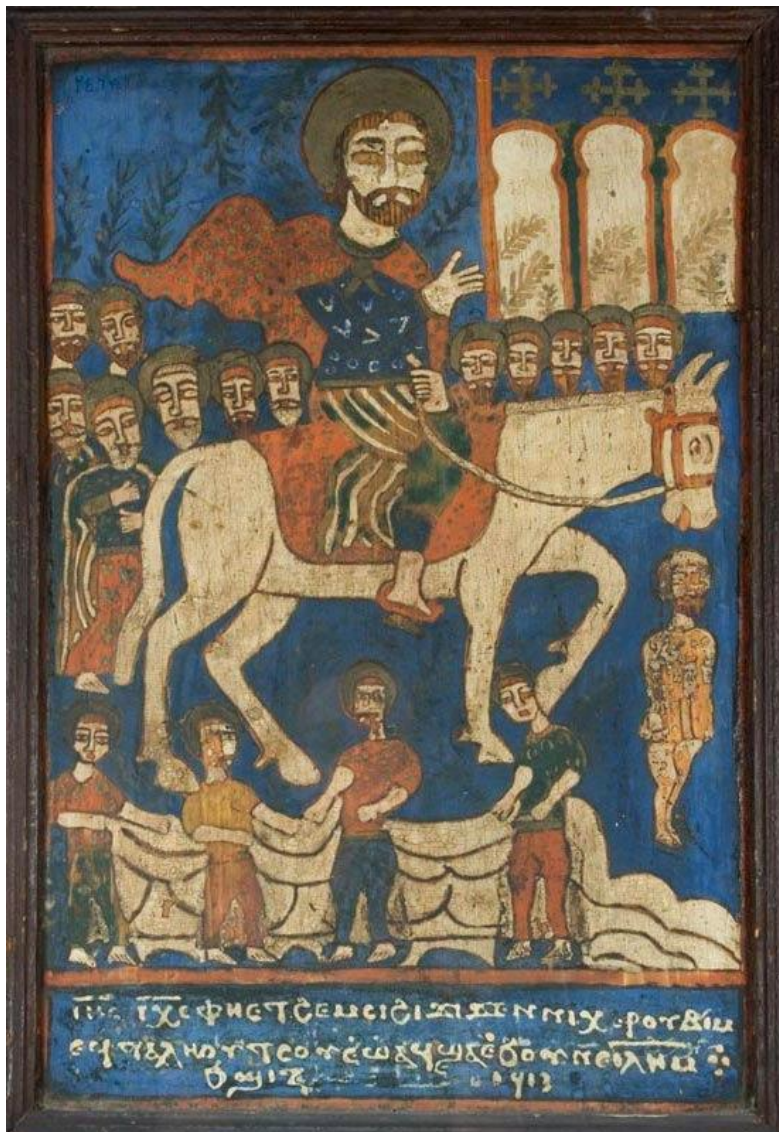
Fig. 26: Akhmim Style, *Jesus entering Jerusalem as a King*, 18th century CE, painted wood, The Coptic Museum, Old Cairo, Egypt.

Fig.27: Bawit Monastery, *Fragment of a Mural Painting, Head of Female,* tempura, The Louvre, Department of Egyptian Antiquities, Paris

Fig. 28: Egypt, *Two angels from a Coptic manuscript*, ca. 4th- 7th century CE, parchment, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ireland, CBL Cpt 823.
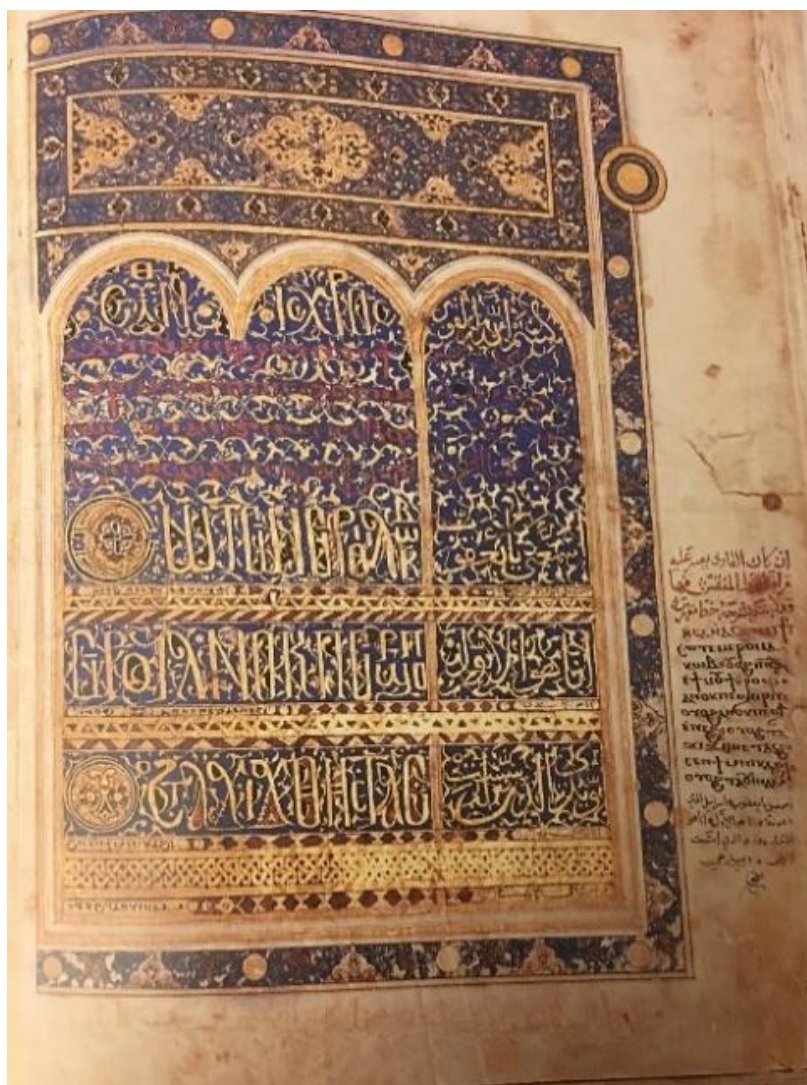
Fig. 29: *Gospel book in Coptic*-Arabic, Coptic Museum, Old Cairo, Egypt.
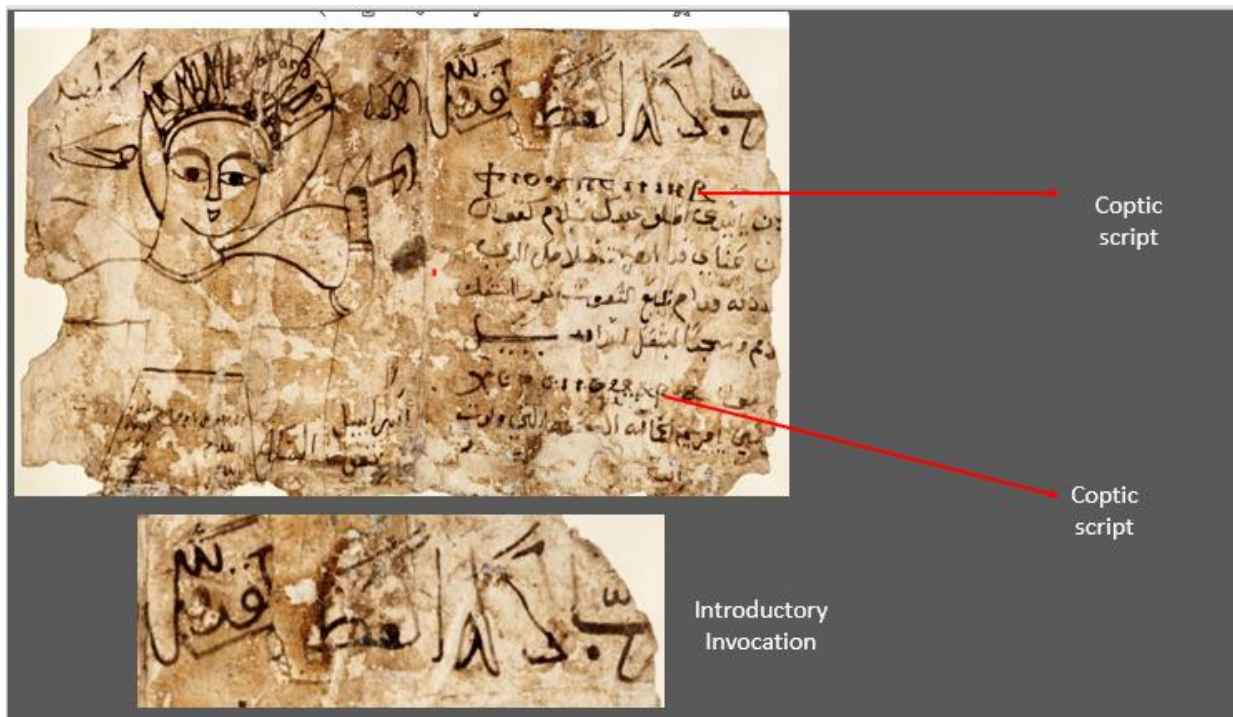
Fig. 30. Egypt, *Archangel Michael and Coptic-Arabic inscriptions,* n.d., paper, Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to Dallas Museum of Art.

Fig.31: Egypt, *Archangel Michael and Coptic-Arabic inscriptions,* n.d., paper, Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to Dallas Museum of Art.

Fig.32: *Coptic Arabic inscription from the Gospel of Luke – Song of Simeon from Sunday Theotokia*, accessed November 15, 2019, http://e.copticbook.net/ebooks/psalmody.php?f=0302#0302
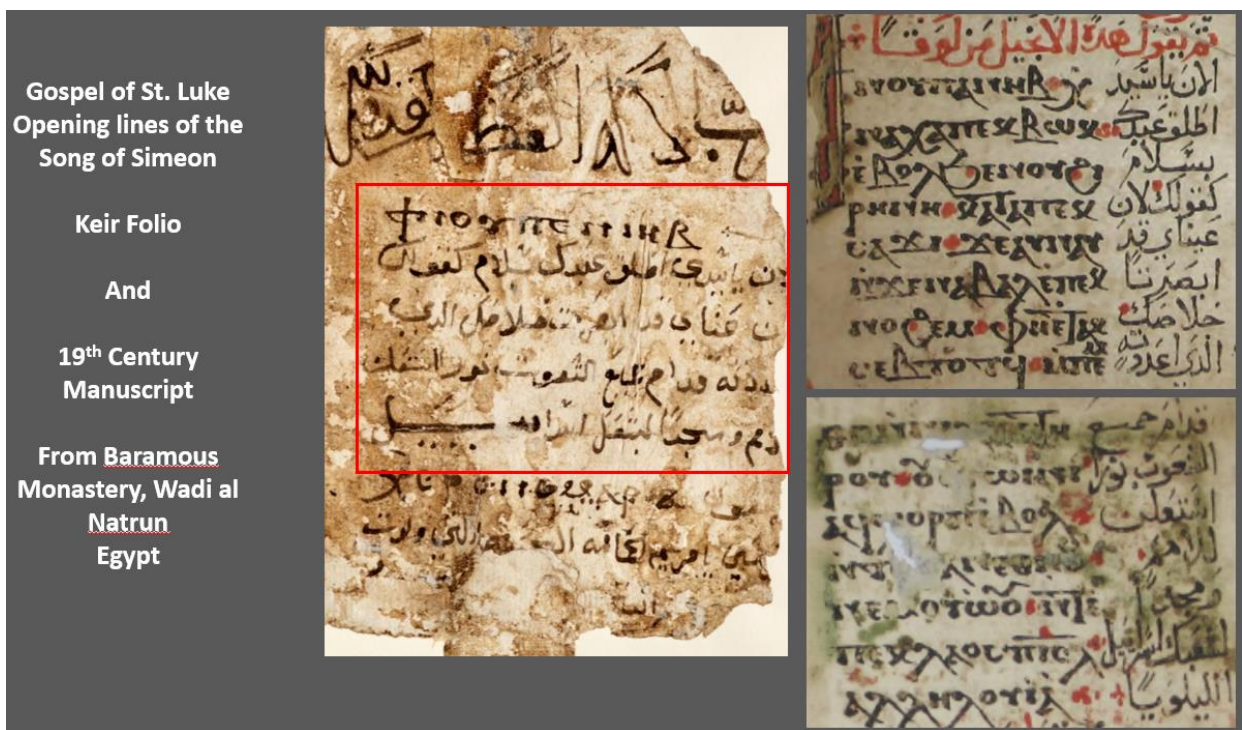
Fig. 33: Comparison: Gospel of Luke (Song of Simeon) in Keir folio and in a 19th century manuscript from the Baramous Monastery in Wad al Natrun, Egypt.
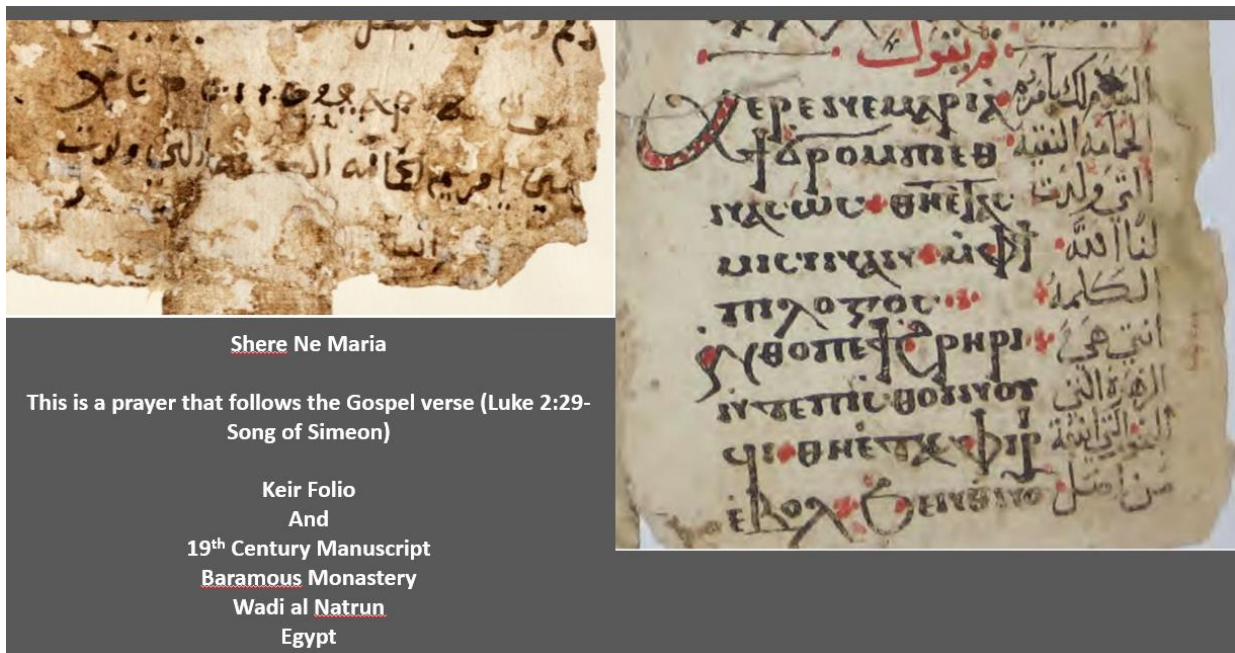

Fig. 34: Comparison: Prayer "Shere Ne Maria" in Keir folio and in a 19th century manuscript-Wadi Natrun
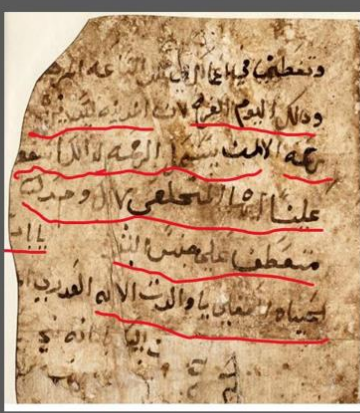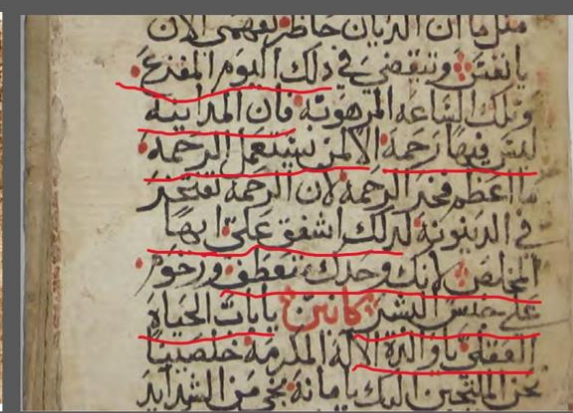
Fig. 35: Comparison: Inscription on St. George folio and a 19th century manuscript from Baramous Monastery, Wadi al Natrun, Egypt. Accessed November 15, 2019, https://st-takla.org/Agpeya/Agbeya_Midnight.html

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  - Develop Content and Deliver Presentations

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