

The Representation of Virgin Mary in Islamic Art during the Ayyubid Dynasty (12th – 13th Century)

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Abstract: The Islamic art witnessed the appearance of a group of objects marked with Christian scenes and figures during the thirteenth century. They included scenes of the Virgin Mary, Jesus, priests and priestesses. The present research sheds light on the representations of the Virgin Mary in the Islamic art during the Ayyubid Dynasty. It aims to study how the Virgin Mary was represented in Islamic art and to investigate the influence of the Byzantine, Coptic and Western Christian art on such representations. The research adopted the descriptive analytical methodology and focused on the scenes depicting the Virgin Mary in the Islamic art during the Ayyubid dynasty.

Keywords: Virgin Mary- Islamic Art- Metalwork- Christian Themes

1. INTRODUCTION

The mutual influence between Christian art and Islamic art was present throughout ages with various concentrations. The direct contacts between the Ayyubids and the Crusades; through war, peace treaties or trade, influenced Islamic art and resulted in a group of objects with Christian images. That phenomenon occurred during the thirteenth century in particular with the appearance of a group of metal and ceramic objects that were decorated with Christian scenes and figures. Such objects were sent to Crusader princes as gifts or sold in the markets for private use.

The group of Islamic metal objects, attributed to the 13th century and marked with the use of Christian scenes is considered a distinct group. It includes 15 objects that formed an isolated group, unique and different from the rest of 13th century Islamic metalwork. This group attracted the attention of scholars and researchers and some of the objects were subject to detailed studies.³ The Islamic metal objects with Christian themes are: three pyxes, three incense burners, three ewers, three large plates, a candlestick, a canteen and a basin.⁴ They were attributed to workshops in Syria and Egypt and were decorated with scenes of Virgin Mary, Jesus, angels, priests and priestesses. They varied in use, size and quality. A ceramic plate of the same era was also marked with a scene of the Virgin Mary with Jesus. It is a unique example of Islamic ceramics.

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³ M. Aga-Oglu, "About a Type of Islamic Incense Burner", *Art Bulletin* 27, 1945; D. Barret, *Islamic Metalwork in the British Museum*, London, 1949; D. S. Rice, "The Brasses of Badr al-Din Lu'lu", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13, 1950; D. S. Rice, "The Seasons and the Labors of the Months in Islamic Art", *Ars Orientalis* 1, 1954; M.S. Dimand, "A Silver Inlaid Bronze Canteen with Christian Subjects in the Eumorfopoulos Collection", *Ars Orientalis* 1, 1954; L. Schneider, "The Freer Canteen", *Ars Orientalis* 9, 1973; G. Fehervari, *Islamic Metalwork of the Eighth to the Fifteenth Century in the Keir Collection*, London, 1976; Eva Baer, "A Brass Vessel from the tomb of Sayyid Battal Ghazi", *Artibus Asiae* 39, 1977; R. A. Katzenstein and G. D. Lowry, "Christian Themes in Thirteenth-Century Islamic Metalwork", *Muqarnas*, vol.1, 1983; Eva Baer, *Ayyubid Metalwork with Christian Images*, Leiden, 1989; H. Ecker and T. Fitzherbert, "The Freer Canteen Reconsidered", *Ars Orientalis* 42, 2012.

⁴ Katzenstein and Lowry, "Christian Themes", *Muqarnas*, vol. 1, p. 54..

Although previous studies focused on these objects; they paid attention to the over-all decorations and significance of the scenes in general. The present study aims to reexamine the scenes of Virgin Mary in particular to examine how she was represented and to analyze her scenes. It also aims to investigate the influence of the Byzantine, Coptic and Western Christian art on such representations. Therefore, the study adopted the descriptive approach focusing only on 5 Islamic metal objects and 1 ceramic object which all bear scenes of the Virgin Mary. Then such scenes were analyzed to discuss its style and context.

2. THE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

The Islamic art includes five metal objects and a ceramic plate which carry the representation of Virgin Mary. These objects were attributed to the Ayyubid era and they are as follows:

2.1. The Freer Canteen

This ceremonial unique canteen is preserved in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC. It is attributed to the mid-13th century and was made of brass inlaid with silver and black organic material. It was made in several sections and soldered together. It has a spherical top with flattened central medallion, while the back is flat and the neck is cylindrical with two slender handles.⁵

The canteen was richly decorated (plate 1) with bands of inscription, Christian scenes, human figures and animals in medallions, floral and geometric decorations. Our focus is on the scenes that contain the Virgin Mary, either alone or with Christ. The first scene (plate 2) is adorning the center of the spherical top. It represents the Virgin Mary enthroned and carrying Christ Child. The throne is elaborately decorated with drapery covering the legs, a large cushion on the seat, two posts flanking the high back and the whole throne is carried by two pairs of angels. The throne is flanked by two saints: the one on the left is wearing a long garment and a turban and he is represented with the gesture of praying or adoration with open palms. The saint on the right is bare-headed, bearded, wearing a long garment and holds a boxlike object.⁶



Plate1. *Freer Canteen*

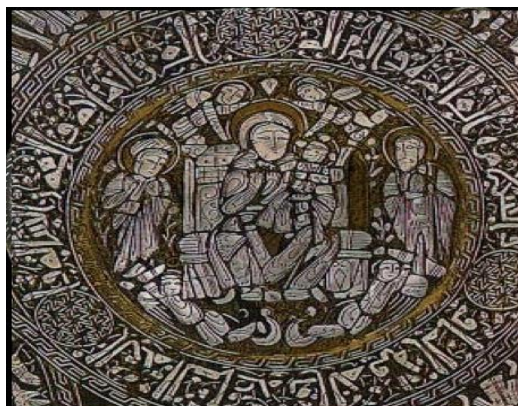


Plate2. *Freer Canteen; The scene of Mary carrying Christ enthroned*

⁵ Esin Atil, W.T. Chase and Paul Jett, *Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art*, Washington DC, 1985, p. 124.

⁶ Esin Atil and others, *Metalwork*, p. 126; Nouran Ibrahim, *Coptic Influence in Islamic Arts since the Arab Conquest till the end of the Mamluk Period*, unpublished MA Thesis, Faculty of Tourism, Alexandria University, 2010, p. 35.

The wide band of decoration on the top of the canteen represents certain episodes from the life of Christ. In the center of the upper register is the scene of Nativity (plate 3): It represents Mary reclining inside the cave next to the crib that holds the Christ Child and above him the heads of three animals (two oxen and a donkey) that look into the cave. On the left of the cave there are three magi riding toward the cave and an angel flying over Mary, while on the right there are three angels. The lower part of the scene is representing Washing of the Christ Child: the infant Christ is being washed in a crescent-shaped bowl with a high stand, by a seated figure on the left and a standing figure pouring water from a jar on the right. On the extreme left, there is a shepherd with three horned animals and on the opposite side there is a seated figure and two other standing figures behind him, one pointing to the upper scene.⁷

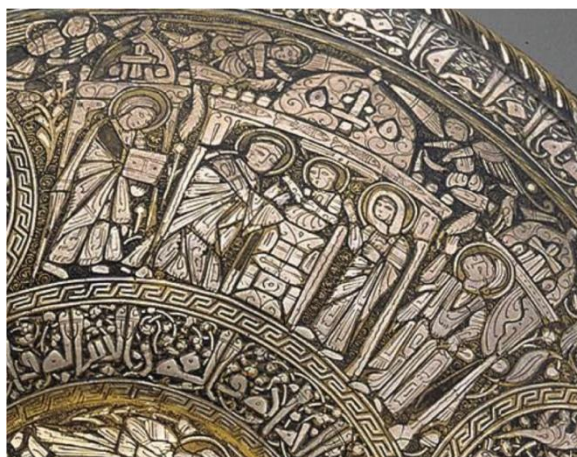


Plate3. *Freer canteen; Scene of Presentation to the Temple*

The second scene represents the Presentation in the Temple (plate 4). The scene represents a building with a wide central section and two lateral narrow sections, each surmounted with a dome decorated with a cross. The lintel below the central dome is also decorated with four fish and a bird. The center of the scene is occupied by Christ who is seated on a pedestal, flanked by Simeon (on the left) who is holding the pedestal with his right hand, and Mary (on the right) who is putting her right hand on Christ's shoulder. Behind Simeon, there is a standing figure carrying a box or basket; probably portraying Joseph. On the opposite side, there is a standing figure holding a scarf-like scroll with her left hand and raising her right hand; probably portraying Anna. Above, there are two birds and four angels flying toward the central dome.⁸

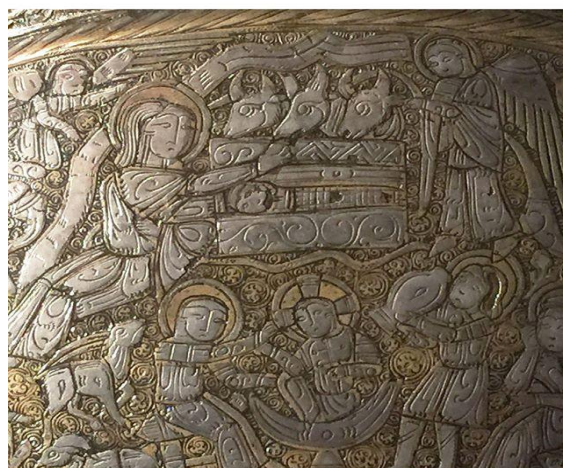


Plate4. *Freer Canteen; Scene of the Nativity*

The flat side of the Canteen is decorated with two concentric zones. The outermost one is decorated with twenty-five standing figures, 17 of them represent saints or clerics wearing long flowing robes

⁷ Esin Atil and others, *Metalwork*, p. 126; Eva Baer, *Ayyubid Metalwork with Christian Images*, p. 20.

⁸ Esin Atil and others, *Metalwork*, p. 126; Nouran Ibrahim, *Coptic Influence*, p. 35.

and stoles, carrying books, censers or caskets. 6 other figures represent warriors with their weapons. The other two figures represent the Annunciation scene (plate 5). It is represented below the opening of the canteen on the right side and it portrays a figure with wings -representing Gabriel- gestures toward Mary; who withdraws slightly.⁹



Plate5. Freer Canteen; the Annunciation scene

2.2. The Freer Basin of Najm al-Din Ayyub

This imperial brass basin is preserved in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC. It is attributed to the mid-13th century (1239-1240) and was made of brass inlaid with silver and black organic material. It was made in Syria or Egypt and it represents the epitome of the technical and aesthetic achievements of the Ayyubid metalwork. It has straight sides with widening rim and it was richly decorated from inside and outside. The decoration is divided into horizontal registers (plate 6).¹⁰



Plate6. Basin of Najm al-Din Ayyub

The representation of the Virgin Mary is witnessed on the exterior surface, in the upper wide register which is decorated with a band of plaited kufic inscription giving the name of the patron. This band is interrupted with five lobed-medallions that contain scenes from the life of Christ; two of which include the Virgin Mary. The scenes are arranged counterclockwise. The first medallion represents the Annunciation (plate 7); showing Mary seated on a raised bench, raising her left arm, holding a branch and turning her head backwards looking at Gabriel who is represented as a standing figure with two large wings, approaching her. The second medallion in turn represents the Adoration (plate 8); showing Mary seated cross-legged on a low decorated bench holding the Child Christ who is setting on her right leg and raising his right arm to her shoulder. Mary is attended by two angels flanking her. The other three medallions represent Raising of Lazarus, Entry into Jerusalem and the Last Supper.¹¹

⁹ Katzenstein and Lowry, “Christian Themes”, *Muqarnas*, vol.1, p. 56; Nouran Ibrahim, *Coptic Influence*, p. 36.

¹⁰ Esin Atil and others, *Metalwork*, p. 137; Nouran Ibrahim, *Coptic Influence*, PP. 41-42.

¹¹ Esin Atil and others, *Metalwork*, PP. 138-139; Rachel Ward, “Style versus Substance: The Christian Iconography on Two Vessels Made for the Ayyubid Sultan al-Salih Ayyub”, in: *The Iconography of Islamic Art*, Brenard O’Kane (ed.), AUC Press, 2005, p. 317.

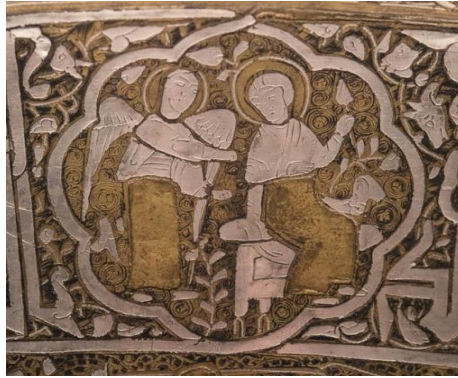


Plate7. *Basin of Najm al-Din Ayyub; Annunciation scene*



Plate8. *Basin of Najm al-Din Ayyub; the Adoration scene*

2.3. Musée des Arts Décoratifs Candlestick

This candlestick is preserved at Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. It is made by Dawud ibn Salamah and attributed to the 13th century (1249). It was made of brass and inlaid with silver; most of which no longer exists. The base of the candlestick is conical in shape and surmounted with a socket (plate 9). It's believed that this candlestick was among the products of Dawud al-Musili.¹²



Plate9. *Paris candlestick*

The base of the candlestick is decorated with three registers; the upper and the lower are richly decorated with ogival arch-shaped medallions containing saints in various posts and positions. The middle register which is the widest contains four large lobed medallions that contain scenes from the life of Christ, in addition to other small medallions with animal figures. The first medallion represents the Virgin Mary standing in the center carrying the Child Christ and behind her a standing figure, probably Joseph. Samaan is approaching to take the child and behind him Anna holding a conical-shaped cup (plate 10). The fourth medallion represents the Baptism of Christ (plate 11); showing him in the center; dressed and standing on two horizontal wooden beams that float on a fish (symbolizing

¹² Nouran Ibrahim, *Coptic Influence*, p. 38.

Jordan River). He is facing a bearded man; John, who is leaning towards Child Christ, baptizing him with his left hand and holding with a long piece of cloth in his right hand. Behind Child Christ are two standing figures.¹³



Plate10. Paris candlestick; the Virgin Mary standing carrying Christ and surrounded by standing figure

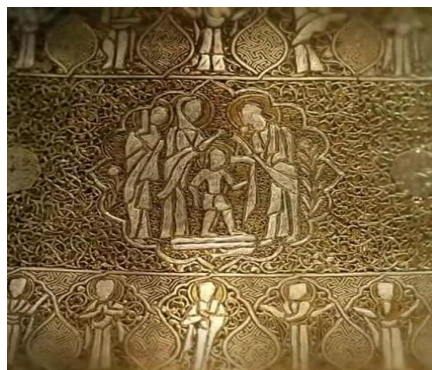


Plate11. Paris candlestick; Baptism of Christ

2.4. Musée des Arts Décoratifs ewer

It is a brass ewer inlaid with silver and was attributed to the 13th century. It is preserved at Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. The body of the ewer is decorated with 6 registers of varied decorations including bands of inscription, floral and geometric decorations, and medallions with scenes of warriors, musicians and dancers (plate 12).



Plate12. Paris ewer

¹³ Katzenstein and Lowry, “Christian Themes”, *Muqarnas*, vol.1, p. 59: He described the two figures as “two unspecified figures” while another study; Nouran Ibrahim, *Coptic Influence*, PP. 39-40, described the closer figure as Virgin Mary. In fact, this can’t be accepted since the Virgin never accompanied the Christ during the baptism. The two figures that used to appear in the scene of the baptism are two angels holding garments that could be the garments removed by Jesus to step into the river or towels for drying after coming out. See: G. Millet, *Recherches sur L’iconographie de L’evangile aux XIV, XV et XVI siecle*, Paris, 1961, P. 171 ff; Ch. Walter, “Baptism in Byzantine Iconography”, *Sobornost* 2/2, 1980, PP. 8-25.

The wide register on the shoulder of the ewer contains a representation of the Virgin Mary with Christ. This register is decorated with standing figures as if in a parade. The Virgin Mary is represented standing in front position, carrying Child Christ and wearing a crown on her head. She is flanked with two figures that are looking at her. The figure on her left side approaches the Child (Plate 13).¹⁴ Of course her representation carrying Child Christ while standing and her crown are both unique.¹⁵

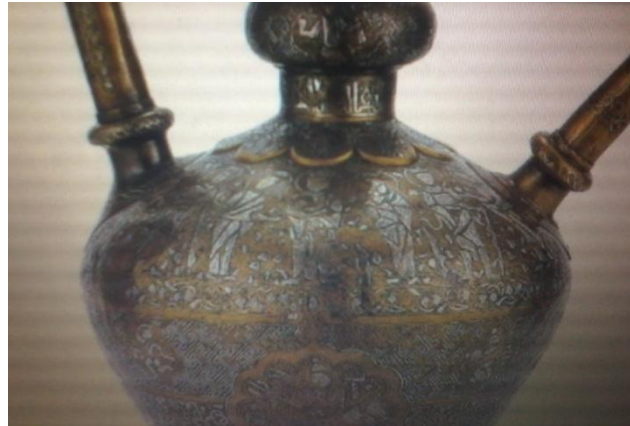


Plate13. *Paris ewer; The Virgin Mary standing and carrying Christ Child*

2.5. Metropolitan Pyxis

This Pyxis is made of brass and inlaid with silver. It was probably made in Syria and attributed to the 13th century. The body of the box is decorated with 8 lobed arches each containing standing figures of saints and ecclesiastics in addition to the scene of Christ entering Jerusalem (plate 14).¹⁶



Plate14. *Metropolitan Pyxis*

The cover of the box is decorated with a large 4-lobed medallion containing the scene of Mary seated and carrying Child Christ (plate 15). Mary is represented carrying Christ on her right arm and looking at him. She is wearing a turban-like headgear which is surrounded with scalloped halo in addition to wide clothes with wide trousers under her gown. Joseph is represented on the right side of Mary in a small figure.¹⁷

¹⁴ Eva Baer, *Ayyubid Metalwork*, p. 16; Nouran Ibrahim, *Coptic Influence*, p. 54.

¹⁵ Katzenstein and Lowry, "Christian Themes", *Muqarnas*, vol.1, PP. 59-61.

¹⁶ Nouran Ibrahim, *Coptic Influence*, p. 48; Maryam Ekhtiar, Sheila R. Canby, Navina Haidar, and Priscilla P., *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1st ed. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011, pp. 138, 152-153.

¹⁷ Eva Baer, *Ayyubid Metalwork*, p. 14.



Plate15. Metropolitan Pyxis; the Virgin Mary seated and carrying Christ

2.6. Islamic Art Museum Ceramic Plate

This object is a fragment of under-glaze painted plate attributed to the 13th century and preserved in the Islamic art Museum in Cairo. It is colored with blue and black on a white background and covered with transparent glaze. It was made in Syria or Egypt. Another part of the same plate is preserved in Benaki Museum in Athens.¹⁸

The decoration represents the Virgin Mary holding the body of Christ demonstrating the Deposition from the Cross. Mary's body is totally covered with her wide dress and she covers her hair too and her features reflect sadness while Christ is half-naked, leaning on her head and his features reflect pain (plate 16). The Benaki fragment represents other standing figures flanking the cross and represented with halos around their heads and with sad features in addition to two angels shown flanking the cross.



Plate16. Fragment of Ceramic plate in Islamic Art Museum in Cairo

3. THE ANALYTICAL STUDY

The examination of the previously described objects that were decorated with scenes of Virgin Mary revealed that the Virgin Mary appeared in certain postures as follows:

3.1. The Virgin Mary Enthroned or Theotokos Hodegetria:

The first posture is showing the Virgin Mary sitting on the throne and carrying Child Christ and it is represented on the Freer Canteen. In fact, the posture of Virgin Mary sitting on a throne was popular in the Christian art. Some scholars thought that the representation of Virgin Mary enthroned and nursing Jesus the Christ; which was known as *Theotokos Galaktotrophousa*, could be dated back as early as the third century.¹⁹ there was no clear evidence to emphasize this theory; as the oldest shape of *Theotokos Galaktotrophousa* came from a crater from Constantinople, dates to 380-390 and

¹⁸ Bernard O'Kane (ed.), *Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museum of Cairo*, AUC press, Cairo, 2006, p. 142.

¹⁹ V. Tran Tam Tinh, *Isis lactans, Corpus des monuments gréco-romains d'Isis allaitant Harpocrate*, Leiden: Brill, 1973, PP. 46-49

preserved now in Musei Nazionale delle Terme in Rome (Inv. 67629).²⁰ However, it is thought that the title that the Virgin gained as "Theotokos" means "Mother of the God" appeared in Alexandria and then accepted as a valid universal dogma at the Council of Ephesus in 431²¹ – which opened the door for more elaborate depictions of Mary in Christian art by designating her as *Theotokos*.²² In this shape, she was represented enthroned carrying Jesus but without nursing him. Later, the shape became more elaborate as the enthroned *Theotokos* appeared pointing to her child; a type known as *Theotokos Hodegetria*. In contrast to the standing and the *torso Hodegetria*, the enthroned *Hodegetria* was never generally accepted in the Byzantine tradition. However, the enthroned *Hodegetria* remained very popular in Armenia and Georgia until the late Middle Ages.²³ It's worth mentioning also that the enthroned *Theotokos Hodegetria* appeared in two manuscripts that were made for the Syrian Orthodox Church which were: a lectionary in the Vatican library (Vat. Syr. 559), that was made at the Monastery of Mar Mattai near Mosul in North Mesopotamia (1219-1220), and the related lectionary (ca 1220) in the British Library (Add. 7170), that was made either in the same monastery, or in an affiliated one, possibly Mar Hanania (Deir al-Za^cfaran) near Mardin.²⁴

The representation on the Freer Canteen shows the Virgin *Theotokos* with flying angels surrounding the throne (two of them flying over the throne, and the other two holding the throne from below), in addition to the representations of two saints flanking the throne. In Egypt, the throne of the Virgin could be flanked by saints or life-sized angels. The earliest example of this shape was represented in an Icon from the Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai which dates to the 6th century²⁵ (Plate 17). It should be noted here that the art in this monastery didn't follow the Coptic art, but the Byzantine art. It seems that in the early Coptic art the angels were used only to accompany Jesus the Christ. According to the bible, the four angels that fly around the throne of God are Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael. It was not until the medieval period that the representation of the enthroned Virgin accompanied by life-sized angels started to appear in the Coptic art. This could be seen in a wall painting from the 12th century in Deir Al-Shuhada, at Esna²⁶(Plate 18). Still, no representation of flying angels accompanied the enthroned Virgin was found in the Coptic art in Egypt till the 13th century. Its first appearance was in Deir el-Suryan at Wadi El-Natrun, as a fan (flabellum)²⁷ was decorated with a scene of the enthroned Virgin similar to that of the Freer Canteen but with only two flying angels above the throne (Plate 19). The flabella dates to the 13th century and it is now preserved in Musée Royal de Mariemont (Morlanwelz, Belgium).²⁸ It should be noted here that this Deir was mainly inhabited with the Syrians. In addition, there are known contacts between this Deir with Mesopotamia; as the inhabitants of the Deir were originally from the Syrian Orthodox Community in Mesopotamia.²⁹ The scholars proved that the origin place of the Freer Canteen was Mesopotamia. Thus, we suggest that both of the flabella and the Freer Canteen belong to the Mosul school of art.

²⁰ Effenberger Arne, " Maria als Vermittlerin und Furbitterin – zum Marienbild in der spatantiken und fruhbyzantinischen kunst Agyptens", in: *Presbeia Theotokou: the intercessory role of Mary across Times and places in Byzantium*, Pauline Allen (ed.) 2015, 58, Fig. 5.

²¹ Effenberger Arne, "Maria als Vermittlerin und Furbitterin", p. 50.

²² E. Schwartz, "Zur Vorgeschichte des Ephesinischen Konzils", *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 112/2, 1914, PP. 249-250.

²³ B. Snelders and M. Immerzeel, "The Thirteenth-Century Flabellum from Deir al-Surian in the Musée Royal de Mariemont (Morlanwelz, Belgium)", *ECA I*, 2004, PP. 120-121

²⁴ H. Ecker and T. Fitzherbert, "The Freer Canteen, Reconsidered", *Ars Orientalis* 42, p. 186

²⁵ H. Belting, *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich, 1990, p. 13

²⁶ J. Leroy, *Les Peintures des Couvents du Désert D'Esna*, IFAO 94, Le Caire, 1975, Pl. 27; P. Laferrier, "La Bible Murale", *MIFAO* 127, 2008, pl. XX

²⁷ A **flabellum** (plural **flabella**), in Christian liturgical use, is a fan made of metal, leather, silk, parchment or feathers, intended to keep away insects from the consecrated Body and Blood of Christ and from the priest, as well as to show honor.

²⁸ Julian Ruby, "The Principle of Parsimony and the Problem of the Mosul School of Metalwork", *Metalwork and Material culture in the Islamic world*, James Allan (Eds.), New York, 2012, 50, Fig. I.24; J. Leroy, "Un flabellum syriaque date du Deir Souriani (Egypte)", *Cahiers de Mariemont*, 5-6, 1974-1975, PP. 31-39.

²⁹ B. Snelders, "The thirteenth-century Flabellum", PP. 113-139; L. Rompay L. – A. Schmidt, "Takritans in the Egyptian Desert: The Monastery of the Syrians in the Ninth century", *JCSSS I*, 2001, PP. 41-60.



Plate17. *Icon of the enthroned Virgin, Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, 6th century*



Plate18. *Enthroned Virgin, Deir El- Shuhada, Esna, 12th century*



Plate19. *Falbella, from Deir El-Syrian, Wadi El-Natrun, Egypt. 13th century. Preserved in Musee Royal de Mariemont, Belgium*

As for the presence of the angels, Lloyd had traced the representation of the Virgin and Child enthroned accompanied by the angels in Byzantium and Rome.³⁰ The researcher noticed that although, the byzantine art was familiar with the representation of two flying angels above the throne of the Virgin Mary, the representation of more than two flying angels was a common element in the western art during the medieval period. Generally, the angels were arranged around the throne; as we can always see two of them flying over the throne and the other two supporting it. Examples of such scenes could be seen in a fresco from the dome of the church of Maria zur Höhe in Soest that dates to

³⁰ J. Lloyd, "Mary, Queen of the Angels: Byzantine and Roman images of the Virgin and Child enthroned with attendant angels", *Melbourne Art Journal*, Issue 5, 2001, 5-24.

the 12th century (c. 1120)³¹ (Plate 20) and also in a mosaic from the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in Monte Carlo, Monaco that adopted the 12th century style (Plate 21).



Plate20. Mosaic, dome of the church of Maria zur Höhe in Soest 12th century

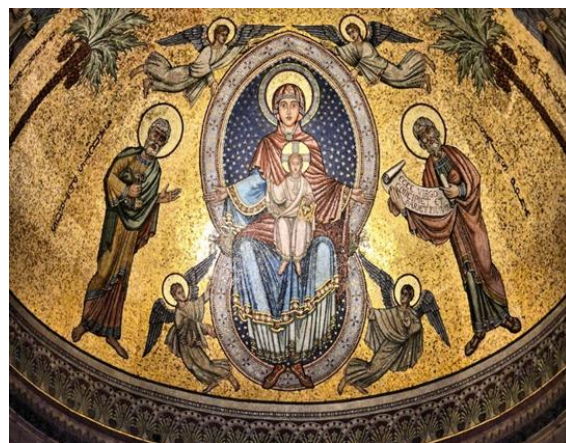


Plate21. Mosaic the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in Monte Carlo, Monaco

From this we can conclude that the scene of the Virgin Mary enthroned and carrying Child Christ represented on the Freer Canteen followed the Byzantine style of art mixed with some western elements. This mixture between the eastern and the western elements was common in the Christian representations at that time because of the presence of the crusader artists who adopted the Byzantine style and made this mixture.

3.2. The Nativity Scene

The second posture for the Virgin Mary is witnessed in the Nativity scene; where the Virgin Mary was usually depicted reclining after giving birth to Jesus who is represented sleeping in a cradle. The whole scene used to be represented either in a cave or a stable. The representation of the cave was very common in the Byzantine art in Syria starting from the 6th century. The scene that is represented on the Freer Canteen shows the Virgin reclining in the cave beside the cradle of Jesus. Below, there is a representation of the first bath of the Christ. It is worth mentioning that the scene of the first bath didn't appear in the early Coptic art because this bath is not mentioned neither in the scriptures nor in the Apocrypha³². It first appeared in theological literature in the 9th century. The scene of the bath of the child appeared for the first time, accompanying the nativity scenes, in the eastern Byzantine Empire, and in the 7th century in the west.³³ While, the earliest representation of this combined scenes

³¹ J. Engemann, *Das Hauptportal der Hohnekirche in Soest. Die Reliefdarstellungen und ihre Bedeutung*, Münster, 1991.

³² **Apocrypha** are works, usually written, of unknown authorship or of doubtful origin. The **Biblical apocrypha** denotes the collection of ancient books found in some editions of Christian Bibles in a separate section between the Old and New Testaments or as an appendix after the New Testament.

³³ L. Arad, "The Bathing of the Infant Jesus in the Jordan River and his Baptism in a font: A Mutual Iconographic borrowing in Medieval art", *Miscellanea Liturgica Catalana 11*, 2003, PP. 21-44.

in Egypt is present on an icon dating to the 7th or 8th century in Saint Catherine Monastery in Sinai, which of course followed the Byzantine style of art (Plate 22).³⁴ It was not until the 14th century that this scene was found depicted on a wooden tablet from the hanging church in Cairo, carved in 1300, and preserved now in the British Museum (MLA 1878, 12-3, 1-10).³⁵

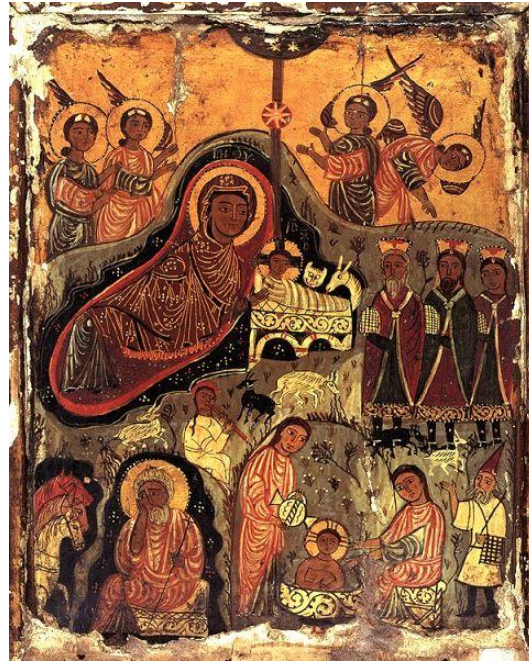


Plate22. Nativity Scene, Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, 7-8th century

It is worth mentioning that the nativity scene represented here contains some unusual elements that were considered by a previous study as being errors³⁶ but we believe that this point of view needs to be reconsidered in light of some new facts as follows:

- The above-mentioned study considered the presence of three animal heads; two oxen and a donkey odd; since only two animal heads should be represented: an ox and a donkey. Schneider assumed that the artist copied a rare representation, in which the artist drew an ox, a donkey, and a sheep in the background. However, we assume that the artist here was not mistaken but followed some rare representations of the nativity scene that show the presence of two oxen and a donkey. The only example that we found for a similar representation is an Armenian manuscript dates to the 1434 and preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Fine arts (Inv. Nr. 2010.108) (Plate 23).³⁷ Although this manuscript dates later than the date of the Canteen, it confirms that such representation couldn't be considered as a mistake. Thus, the representation appeared on the Canteen is considered the earliest known in art. However, the Islamic art could not be the origin of such Christian representation. Therefore, we assume that it could have an earlier root in the Armenian art.

Moreover, the presence of the ox and the donkey in the nativity scene could be explained as being the representation of the nations: the ox represents the Jews, while the donkey represents the Gentiles. This comes from a very important distinction about the two animals. The ox is a “clean” animal, and the ass is an “unclean” animal according to dietary proscription in the Old Testament.³⁸ Thus, we assume that the addition of another Ox could refer to the followers of the new religion (Islam). This could explain the presence of these rare representations under the Islamic rule.

³⁴ K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons. Vol. 1, from the sixth to the tenth century*, Princeton, 1976.

³⁵ Gallimard, *L'art Copte en Egypte. 2000 ans de christianisme*, Ex. Cat., Institut du monde arabe, Paris, May-September 2000, and Musée de l'Égypte, Cap d'Agde, September 2000-January 2001, Paris, 2000, No. 184.1.

³⁶ L. Schneider, “The Freer Canteen”, *Ars Orientalis* 9, p. 140.

³⁷ www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/478665

³⁸ G. Sill, *A handbook of symbolism in Christian art*, University of Michigan, 1975, P. 121.



Plate23. *Tempera and gold leaf on paper, from "Four Gospels in Armenia" Metropolitan Museum of Art (2010.108)*

- Schneider considered the representation of the three magi³⁹ odd; as they were represented with a headdress not with a crown. He mentioned that this type of headdress called “Sharbush”⁴⁰ and was common in Upper Mesopotamia where it appeared in paintings, metalwork, glass, pottery, stucco and coin.⁴¹ He argued that this headdress could infer to the Muslim artist who made this canteen. A different point of view is that the different headdress could infer the nationality of the artist rather than his religion. This headdress was common in the Ayyubid Kingdom among the amirs and Knights, whether they were Muslims or Christians. Moreover, the Magi were represented in other occasions with various headdresses; which varied according to their origin. They were represented in Persian clothes with Phrygian hats, in other occasions; they were represented with crowns or strange pillbox-like headdress. That means; the headdress and clothes of the Magi can reflect their origin and the fashion of their country rather than the religion of the artist.
- The Virgin Mary was represented on the canteen with uncovered hair, which is bizarre; since the Virgin was usually represented with a veil. The uncovered hair of the Virgin was witnessed in the western art starting from the medieval period. It seems that the concept of displaying Mary’s uncovered hair is inferring to the femininity of the Virgin and that she is a beautiful woman but not lusty herself.⁴²
- The two midwives in scene of the first Bath of Jesus the Child have halos surrounding their heads; while the halo was used only to surround either the heads of the saints or angels. The shape of the haloed midwives appeared in the two manuscripts of the Vatican library (Vat. Syr. 559) (Plate 24) and the related lectionary in the British Library (Add. 7170) from 1220. As long as the two manuscripts related to the Syrian Gospel that was produced in what is called now North Iraq, it emphasizes the theory that the piece was made by a Mosul artist.

It seems that the nativity scene appeared on the canteen carried the Byzantine influence mixed with some western elements (Mary with uncovered hair). This could also be related to the presence of the Crusader artists in this area. We can suggest that the repertoire of the Crusader artist was accessible to Muslim artists and they might have inspired some topics, scenes or details from it; especially that such inspiration could add an additional advantage to their products that target the Crusader market.

³⁹ They are **Three Wise Men** or **Three Kings**, were a group of distinguished foreigners who visited Jesus after his birth, bearing gifts.

⁴⁰ It was used instead of the turban and was the headdress of the Ayyubid amirs and the knights in Egypt during the Ayyubid era.

⁴¹ L. Schneider, “The Freer Canteen”, *Ars Orientalis* 9, p. 147.

⁴² R. Miliken, *Ambiguous locks: An iconology of Hair in Medieval Art and Literature*, North Carolina, 2012, PP. 181-182.



Plate24. *Nativity scene, Syrian Orthodox Lectionary, 1220 or 1260. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Syriaco 559*

3.3. The presentation of Jesus in the Temple

According to the gospel, Mary and Joseph took the infant Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem after 40 days of his birth. Joseph used to carry two or three doves as a sacrifice. Sometimes he carries them in a basket, a box, or a birdcage.⁴³ When they entered the temple, they met Simeon (one of the seventy-two translators of the Septuagint) who uttered the prayer. The elderly prophetess Anna was also in the temple and offered prayers to God for Jesus. The earliest representation of such theme appeared in the Christian Western art starting from the 8th or the 9th century, where the scene focused on the ritual done at an altar in the presence of Simeon and Anna. However, the scene of the presentation to the temple in the Byzantine and Coptic art, used to focus on the moment of meeting Simone at the entrance of the temple.⁴⁴ There are also other images that were favored in the west during the Middle Ages and early renaissance period representing Jesus the Child placed or about to be placed on an altar, and shown sitting, standing or lying on it, accompanied by Simone and Mary. These images can be traced back as early as the ninth century (Plate 25, 26).⁴⁵



Plate25. *Presentation from Sacramentary of Drogo French (Metz), ca.850, Paris, Bibliotheque nationale de France MS Latin 9428, fol.38*

⁴³ L. Reau, *Iconographie de l'Art Chretien*, Paris, 1957, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 263-264.

⁴⁴ D. Shorr, "The Iconographic Development of the Presentation in the Temple", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1946, pp. 17-32.

⁴⁵ L. Sinanoglou, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the Corpus Christi Plays", *Speculum*, Vol. 48, No. 3, July 1973, pp. 491-509.



Plate26. *Presentation from St. Albans Psalter English (St. Albans), 1121-1146 Hildesheim, Dombibliothek Folio.28*

The scene of the presentation of Jesus to the temple appeared on the Freer Canteen and the Paris Candlestick. The scene that is represented on the canteen followed the Western art that focused on the ritual done inside the temple on the altar; as illustrated before. As for the scene appeared on the candlestick, it focused on the moment of meeting Simon at the entrance of the temple; which was very familiar in the Byzantine art. However, the presentation of the Virgin on the right side is bizarre; since Simeon was the one that used to be represented on the right side followed by Anna while the Virgin is usually represented on the left side followed by Joseph. Thus, the candlestick was probably made in Syria as it follows the Byzantine art.

3.4. The Virgin Mary on the ground or Virgin Humility:

In this posture, the Virgin Mary is represented sitting on the ground or sitting upon a low cushion or low bench and holding Jesus on her lap. The word *humility*, from the Latin ‘*humus*’, means earth or ground. This theme was invented by the Franciscan⁴⁶ who experienced humility as a way of life; as they had neither tables nor beds, but slept and ate on the ground. The scholars emphasized on the appearance of this theme in the fourteenth century in Europe.⁴⁷

According to the scholars, the earliest known painting of this type, dates to 1340 and is made by an Italian artist called Simone Martine in the cathedral of Notre-Dame-des-Domes in Avignon.⁴⁸ It represents the Virgin seated on a small cushion just above the ground. The Child Jesus that she holds partially looks at the viewer and holds a scroll in his hands inscribed with the words “Ego sum lux mundi” which means “I am the Light of the World”. There is an Angel on the left presents Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi to the Virgin and the Child, another angel appeared on the right (Plate 27).⁴⁹



Plate27. *Virgin Humility by Simone Martine, cathedral of Notre-Dame-des-Domes in Avignon, 1340*

⁴⁶ The Franciscans are a group of related mendicant religious orders within the Catholic Church, founded in 1209 by Francis of Assisi in Italy. The Franciscan presence in the Holy Land started in 1217, when the province of Syria was established: M. Robson M., *The Franciscans in the Middle Ages*, Woodbridge, 2006.

⁴⁷ G. King, “The Virgin of Humility”, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1935, pp. 474-491.

⁴⁸ J. Polzer, “Concerning the Origin of the Virgin of Humility Theme”, *Revue d’art Canadienne*, Vol. 27m No 1/2, 2000, pp. 1-31

⁴⁹ F. Enaud, “Les fresques de Simone Martini à Avignon”, *Les monuments historiques de la France N.S.* 9, 1963, pp. 115–80.

This Posture appeared on the Basin of Al-Salih, and the Metropolitan Cylindrical Box. However, the dates of the basin and the box (13th century) are much earlier than the French fresco (14th century). Although the virgin here sits on a low stool rather than a cushion, it still refers to the humility posture in which one is placed physically low to the ground. So, it seems that the earliest surviving image of Virgin Humility is in Islamic art. This is not surprising especially that before the end of the 13th century, the Franciscan province of Syria was established; which probably affected the art in this region.

In the image of *Virgin Humility* that appeared on the Metropolitan Box, Virgin Mary wears a turban-like headdress. The usual shape of the Virgin headdress is the veil, but here she wears a turban. Tracing the shapes of the Virgin Mary with a turban, we found that the earliest representation is from the 12th or the 13th century on a Byzantine Icon from Herakleion and now displayed in the Church of Santa Maria delle Salute in Venice (Pl. 28).⁵⁰ Later, Andrea Mantegna produced a series of paintings with a yellow-turbaned Madonna at the turn of the sixteenth-century. Among the series, the painting named “*The Adoration of the Magi*” which is generally dated between 1495 and 1505 is perhaps the first one (Pl. 29).⁵¹ The shape of the turban here is much similar to the turban appeared on the Islamic box; in which both ends of the turban hang on the neck. It seems that this turban headdress was a familiar headdress for the Jewish Women. This could infer to the artist’s intention to show the Virgin’s historic role as the mother of Christ, the “King of the Jews”.

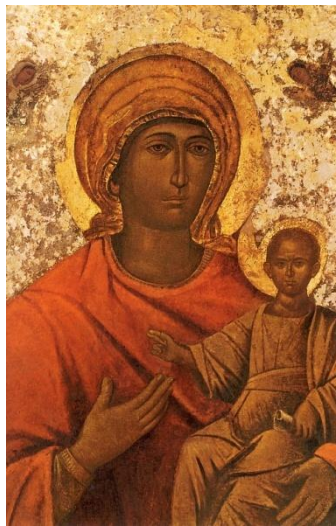


Plate28. Byzantine Icon from Herakleion displayed in the Church of Santa Maria delle Salute, Venice , 12-13th century



Plate29. The adoration of Magi by Andrea Mantegna 1495-1505

⁵⁰ M. Georgopoulou, “Venice and the Byzantine Sphere”, In *Byzantium Faith and Power* (1261-1557), H. Evans (eds.), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004, pp. 489-491.

⁵¹ W.C. Dawson – Andrea Mantegna, *Adoration of the Magi*, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 1997, p. 71, 73 and 95.

3.5. The Annunciation scene

In the Annunciation scene, the Virgin is represented approached by the angel Gabriel to announce her that she will conceive a child and become the mother of Jesus. This scene was represented on the Freer Canteen and the Basin of Al-Salih. In the Freer Canteen scene the Virgin was represented standing; drawing back as if she was frightened or surprised by the angelic apparition. The ancient representation of the Virgin in the annunciation scene shows her sitting. It seems that the Byzantine art adopted a new representation of the Virgin, in which she was represented standing. The oldest representation of the standing Mary in the annunciation scene could be found in the Rabbula Codex Folio 4a, that dates back to the 6th century.⁵² This theme started to be common in the Byzantine art starting from the 9th century.⁵³

The scholars who describe the shape of the Virgin appeared on the Basin of Al-Salih, mentioned that the Virgin holds a branch with her hand⁵⁴; however, a close examination of the scene shows a yarn on her lap; suggesting that Virgin here is holding a spindle not a branch. According to the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, chapter 9, Mary and some servants are assigned the job of spinning thread to be woven into a new veil for the Temple. During working on the purple thread an angel says to her, "Blessed art thou, Mary; for in thy womb thou hast prepared a habitation for the Lord." The next day he appears to her again inside the Temple while she is spinning the thread.⁵⁵ The same is mentioned in the Gospel of James (11, 1-2).⁵⁶



Plate30. Annunciation, wooden Panel, Egypt, 5th century, Louvre Museum

The representation of the spinning Virgin in the annunciation scene is considered a Syrian invention. It first appeared in Christian art in the 5th century in Rome, precisely in a mosaic from the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, and also on a sarcophagus in Ravenna (preserved in Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abt. Rom, Inst.Neg. 66.2785).⁵⁷ The same shape appeared in Egypt around the same period. The first example of this scene is witnessed in a wooden panel from the 5th century AD, preserved in the Louvre Museum (E 17118) (Plate 30). It was probably part of a small piece of furniture or a chancel wall. The Annunciation scene is partial as Archangel Gabriel is missing from the fragment. The Virgin is seated on a tall, square-legged chair. She is portrayed in profile with her legs almost crossed; spinning wool to make a veil for the Temple when the archangel arrived. A small basket rests on her right knee. The basket is filled with wool, and the Virgin's right hand, which must

⁵² M. Bernabo, "The Miniatures in the Rabbula Gospels. Postscripta to a Recent Book", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 68, 2014, 353, Fig. 17.

⁵³ G. Millet, *Recherches sur L'icongraphie*, p. 68.

⁵⁴ Esin Atil and others, *Metalwork*, p. 138-139; Rachel Ward, "Style versus Substance", p. 317.

⁵⁵ D. Robb, "The Iconography of the annunciation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 18, issue 4, 1936, P. 481.

⁵⁶ Protoevangelium of Iakobos 11, 1-2.

⁵⁷ D. Don William, *The Annunciation from the right: from early Christian themes to the sixteenth century*, New York University, 1965, P. 6.

once have held a spindle, is raised.⁵⁸ Another example from the same period 5th-6th century, appeared on a textile from Akhmim, where the Virgin is represented spinning. She holds the distaff and a basket lies at her feet. Gabriel appeared in front of her (Plate 31).⁵⁹



Plate31. *Annunciation, textile, 5th – 6th century, Akhmim*

The Spinning Virgin completely disappeared from the Coptic art. It continued to be represented in the Western art; and it seems to be very familiar in the Byzantine art. Traditionally, the Virgin is represented in an indoor context, although some images use trees to suggest an outdoor setting even though Mary is clearly seated at her weaving.⁶⁰

Example of this shape can be found in an icon from the monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai dates to the 12th century (Plate 32). The icon represents The Virgin sitting before an architectural structure upon her throne, holds in her left hand the red fabric of the temple veil. She holds the spindle with the other hand. Gabriel approaches the Virgin with a fluid running step. The dove of the Holy Spirit hovers slightly above and between them. Many birds are on the ground or in the stream below, and a number of sea creatures are visible in the water including a swordfish and an octopus. The scholars thought that this icon was painted by a Constantinopolitan artist at the monastery.⁶¹



Plate32. *Annunciation, Saint Catherine Monastery, Sinai, 12th century*

⁵⁸ www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/panel-virgin-annunciate

⁵⁹ A. Kendrick, *Catalogue of Textiles from burying-grounds in Egypt*, Vol. III. Coptic Egypt, London 1922, P. 785, Pl. XIX.

⁶⁰ L. Ross, *Medieval Art: A Topical Dictionary*, London, 1996, P.16.

⁶¹ D. Mouriki, "Icons from the twelfth to the fifteenth century", In *Sinai: Treasures of the Monastery of Saint Catherine*, K. A. Manafis (ed.), Athens, 1990, p. 108.

Thus, we can suggest that the influence appeared on the Basin of Al-Salih was Byzantine.

3.6. The Virgin Mary crowned or Maria Regina

It is a depiction of the Virgin in the costume of a Byzantine empress, crowned with a crown. Possibly the first Latin text to actually apply the word "regina" to Mary is the panegyric poem, *In laudem Iustini*, written in Constantinople by the court poet Corippus for the coronation of Justin II in 565.⁶² The Virgin is always shown frontally standing or seated on a throne. The earliest representation of this shape appeared in the west in the 6th century at Santa Maria Antiqua (Rome), where the virgin is represented crowned, enthroned, carrying Jesus on her lap, and flanked by two angels (Plate 33).⁶³ All similar scenes of the same period represented Mary enthroned and carrying Jesus. Later in the 8th and the 9th century, the Virgin was represented as a standing crowned orant with the absence of Jesus. This can be noticed in the crypt of Saint Prassede in Rome (9th century).⁶⁴ As for the shape of Maria Regina standing and holding Jesus, it started to be represented in the western art around 1225 but it was limited to the carvings and the statues. Western art was inspired by the monumental stone sculpture on the portals of Gothic cathedrals.⁶⁵ An example of such scene can be seen in an ivory statuette from Paris dates to 1240 and preserved in Victoria & Albert Museum, London (Inv. Nr. 209-1867) (Plate 34).⁶⁶

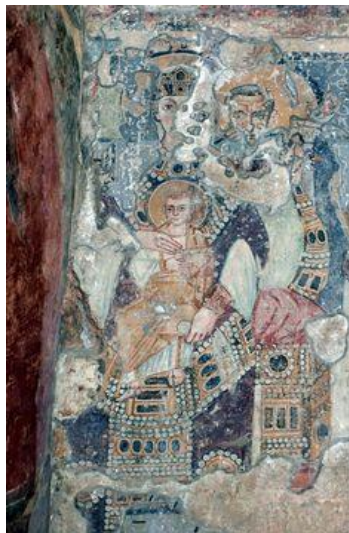


Plate33. *Fresco Maria Regina, Santa Maria Antiqua Church, Rome, 6th century*



Plate34. *Ivory statuette from Paris, 1240 and preserved in Victoria & Albert Museum, London*

⁶² J. Osborne, "The Cult of Maria Regina in Early Medieval Rome", *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia* 21, 2008, pp. 95-106

⁶³ M. Lidova, "The Earliest images of Maria Regina in Rome and the Byzantine Imperial Iconography", *Nis and Byzantium, The collection of Scientific Works VIII*, Nis, 2010, PP. 231-243.

⁶⁴ M. Lawrence, "Maria Regina", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 4, PP. 150-161.

⁶⁵ Gaborit-Chopin Danielle, "Les ivoires gothiques français", Louvre. Trésors du Moyen Âge, *Dossier de l'Art*, n 16, décembre 1993 - janvier 1994, pp. 34-43.

⁶⁶ collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O130510/the-virgin-and-child-group-unknown/

The scene of Maria Regina rarely appeared in the Coptic art in Egypt; however, the representation of the coronation of Mary was common in which two angels were represented fixing the crown on the head of Mary.

The shape of Maria Regina that appeared on the Musée des Arts Décoratifs ewer represents the Virgin Mary crowned in a standing position, holding Jesus, and flanked by two figures that could be angels. Similar shape could be seen on an ivory crozier from Paris dates to 1340-1350 and preserved in the Walter Museum of Art (Inv. Nr. 71.232) (Plate 35).⁶⁷



Plate35. *Ivory Maria Regina, Paris, 1350-1360, Walter Museum of Art*

3.7. The Crucifixion and Deposition of the Christ

The Descent from the Cross, or Deposition of Christ, is the scene, representing taking Christ down from the cross after his crucifixion. In Byzantine art the topic was popular since the 9th century and in the West since the 10th century. Throughout the ages, the details and posing of the composition, and especially the position of Christ's body, are varied.⁶⁸

The representation of Mary on the Islamic ceramic reveals the art of the thirteenth century, in which Mary supports the elbow of Jesus with her arm, and touches the cheek of Jesus. If the scene is completed, we should see Joseph holds the bust of Jesus that leans backwards after his arms had been detached from the cross. Nicodemus would appear kneeling to remove the nail from the feet of Jesus; while John the apostle would appear kissing Jesus' hand. This appeared on an icon from Pisa, preserved in Museo Civico, and dates to the 13th century (Plate 36).⁶⁹

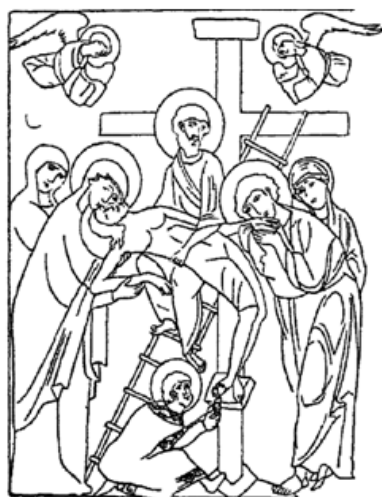


Plate36. *Deposition of the Christ, Pisa, Museo Civico, 13th century*

⁶⁷ <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/28688/virgin-and-child-crucifixion/>

⁶⁸ G. Millet, *Recherches sur L'iconographie*, pp. 467-469.

⁶⁹ G. Millet, *Rechercher sur l'iconographie* , pp. 478-479, Fig. 506.

The theme of the deposition was never represented in the Coptic art in Egypt, the only example of this representation appeared on a wooden panel from the thirteenth century, from an unknown provenance and preserved in the Coptic Museum (Inv. No. 3349) (Plate 37). This panel carries the Byzantine iconographic tradition.⁷⁰

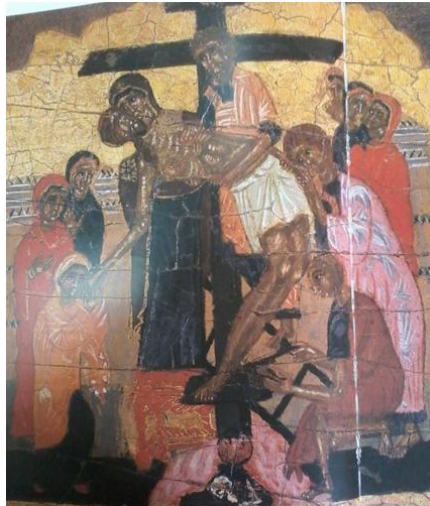


Plate37. *Deposition of the Christ, 13th century, Coptic Museum, Cairo*

The second part of the plate that is preserved in the Benaki Museum carries the scene of the crucifixion. In this scene, Jesus is fixed on the cross, flanked by the Virgin and John the Apostle who used to be represented in sorrow. The cross is flanked by two angels. The crucifixion was very common in the medieval period in the Byzantine and the Western art; however, this theme was never represented in the Coptic art.⁷¹

It's certain that the Islamic plate doesn't carry the Coptic influence, but the Byzantine one. Moreover, we assume that the artist here wasn't a Muslim but a Christian; since Muslims don't believe in the crucifixion of Jesus. Thus, if it was a Muslim artist, he would have chosen a scene from the Christ's life that is acceptable to the Muslims and matching with his own believes.

4. CONCLUSION

Generally, all the mentioned Islamic pieces carry the Byzantine art-style. The researcher assumed that all the previously described pieces were made in Syria and not in Egypt except for the Freer Canteen that was made in Mosul. Although the Christian population in Egypt during the Ayyubid period consists of Copts, Syrians, Armenians⁷², Jacobites, and Ethiopians; the majority of such population were the Copts and the dominant church was the Coptic church. Thus, the influence of the Coptic art was the dominant one. The Armenian and the Syrian art-style was limited⁷³; as they were under the authority of a different church. It was not until the Ottoman period when the whole Christian population of Egypt were under the authority of the Armenian patriarch in Istanbul. This explains the presence of Armenian icons in Coptic church at that time, and the presence of the Armenian influence

⁷⁰ G. Gabra, *The treasures of Coptic art in the Coptic Museum and churches of Old Cairo*, the American University in Cairo Press, 2007, p. 127.

⁷¹ A. Badawy, *Coptic Art and Archaeology: The Art of the Christian Egyptians from the Late Antique to the Middle Ages*, 1978, p. 271.

⁷² During the early years of Islamic expansion in Syria and Palestine, many Armenians become part of the Islamic army, after being converted to Islam. Thus, the Islamic army that conquered Egypt contained Armenian soldiers. During the Fatimid period, the Armenians lived in a special sector at Al-Fustat called Hayy al-Rumi. As for the Christian Armenians, the visit of Catholicos Grigor in 1075 marked the beginning of their presence in Egypt, and the death of Vizier Bahram in 1140 marked its end. In 1172, the Armenian Patriarch left Cairo for Jerusalem, and the Armenian churches and monasteries were closed. For more details see: Dadoyans S., *The Fatimid Armenians cultural & Political interaction in the Near east*, Leiden, 1997, PP. 81-100.

⁷³ The Syrian art-style in Egypt before the Ottoman period, appeared mostly in the monastery of Syrians at Wadi el-Natrun and the monastery of Saint Catherine, that used to be inhabited with Syrian monks. Armenian art-style appeared in an icon from the monastery of the Syrians, in addition to, the wall paintings from Dayr al-Abyad in Suhag. (Gurigiuss M., 2008, P. 50)

on the Coptic art.⁷⁴ Thus, if the Ayyubid artist will take a repertoire from Egypt, he will certainly pick the dominant style which is the Coptic art. Therefore, the researcher assumes that it will be more convenient that these pieces were produced in Syria where the byzantine art-style was the dominant one.

The Freer Canteen is assumed to be made in Mosul. This theory could be based upon the following facts:

- The similarity in the representations appeared on the canteen with the Armenian Manuscripts (obvious in the representation of three animal heads in the nativity scene, and the representation of the enthroned Theotokos Hodegetria). Moreover, Schneider mentioned that the zoomorphic tendril motif appeared on the canteen may be found among Armenian manuscript illumination.⁷⁵
- The influence of the Syrian manuscripts that were fashioned in the Mesopotamian area near Mosul: Vat. Syr. 559 and the British Library (Add. 7170) (obvious in the posture of the enthroned Theotokos Hodegetria and the haloed midwives of the nativity scene).
- The explanation given by Ecker about the function of the Canteen. She mentioned that the Canteen was an ampula used to maintain the holy water. The scholar attributed the ampula to Dayr Mär Behnam the Martyr; known also as Dayr al-Khidr and Dayr al-Khidr Ilyas at northern Iraq, it was revered equally by Christians, Muslims, Jews, Yazidis, and Mongols. From its foundation around 382, it became a place of popular pilgrimage famed for its miracles. Its spring with healing waters was deemed particularly efficacious for skin complaints and epilepsy.⁷⁶

Moreover, the Christian scenes appeared on the Freer Canteen carried the Byzantine influence mixed with some western elements (appeared in the flying angels around the enthroned Virgin, the uncovered hair of the Virgin in the nativity scene, and the scene of the presentation of Jesus to the temple). It seems that the Mosul artist was probably influenced with a repertoire of the crusaders' art. The Crusaders artists settled in this part of the Islamic World starting from the 12th century. By the middle of the 13th century they started to have several workshops not only in Jerusalem, but in many other sites that reached as far as Mosul. Those artists copied the Byzantine art with conscious introductions of western elements.⁷⁷ This could also explain the representations on the rear of the canteen that shows a combat between Crusader and Muslim knights.⁷⁸

The artists of all the metal pieces were Muslims; especially that the Candlestick carries the signature of a Muslim artist. However, we assume that the Islamic ceramic plate couldn't be made by a Muslim artist but a Christian one; as the scenes appeared on the ceramic related to the crucifixion of the Christ which doesn't match with the Muslim Context.

It's worth mentioning also that these Islamic objects gave us the earlier representation of Virgin Humility in art in the whole world (represented on the Basin of Al-Salih, and the Metropolitan Cylindrical Box); as it was previously thought that the earliest image attributed to Simone Martin from the 14th century. The objects also provided us with the earliest representation in art of the two oxen and a donkey in the nativity scene (represented on the Freer Canteen).

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⁷⁴ Guirgius M., *An Armenian artist in Ottoman Egypt: Yuhanna al-Armani and his Coptic Icons*, The American University press, Cairo, 2008, P. 51.

⁷⁵ L. Schneider, "The Freer Canteen", *Ars Orientalis* 9, P.147.

⁷⁶ H. Ecker and T. Fitzherbert, "The Freer Canteen, Reconsidered", *Ars Orientalis* 42, P.186.

⁷⁷ K. Weitzmann, "Icon painting in the Crusader Kingdom", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 20, 1966, P. 56.

⁷⁸ H. Ecker and T. Fitzherbert, "The Freer Canteen, Reconsidered", *Ars Orientalis* 42, P.187.