

Editor's Note

The 14th Annual Coptic Studies Symposium, which was held virtually in October 2021, centered on the theme of “Iconography and Hagiography: Picturing Holiness in Coptic Christianity.”

The symposium aimed to examine unique aspects of holiness in Coptic iconography and hagiographic texts from Late Antiquity to modern times and to discuss innovations in the visualization of holiness from an interdisciplinary perspective. Topics explored included the perpetuation of traditional themes and their origins, as well as the use of icons and monastic wall paintings as edifying aids, and objects of worship.

This volume contains five papers that were presented at the symposium, which explore the links between visual arts and literary writings in expressing holiness.

In her article Gertrud J.M. van Loon discusses the intriguing “Cave of Anba Hadra” which contains wall paintings depicting a set of standing saints, including monks, hermits, bishops, apostles, and evangelists, believed to date back to the 7th or early 8th century. Van Loon explores the meaning of these paintings and raises questions about memory, tradition, patterns, and inspiration. Studying the Anba Hadra Monastery and its cave offers valuable insight into Egypt’s rich cultural and religious history, and ongoing research will continue to shed light on this complex.

Medieval Serbian monastic centres were no exception in creating “New Jerusalem” and rendering the Holy Land and Egypt in visible form. Fr Nebojsa Tumara explores the translation of Egypt into medieval Serbia through the reception of St. Paul’s *vita* into visual culture, arguing that the setting was reinterpreted to suit specific theological or political positions.

In his article, Youhanna Nessim Youssef focuses on exploring the importance of the “Life of Christ” as a central theme in the liturgical practice of the Coptic Church. Through selected liturgical texts, Youssef reveals the different aspects of this subject. By examining the themes depicted on a bronze incense burner currently housed in the Coptic Museum, Youssef highlights the connection between liturgical practice and visual representations.

Ashraf Sadek aims to investigate the origin and significance of the iconographic representation of “Abu Sefein” (St. Mercurius) in Egypt. Since the Middle Ages, this equestrian saint has been known as “the father of two swords.” His iconographic prototype became that of a military saint holding two sabers above his head. By exploring the hagiographical history of Abu Sefein, his martyrdom, and the evolution of his iconography, Sadek seeks to understand the current popularity and legitimacy of this designation.

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George Makary's article explored how Coptic icons, outside of their context in churches, have gained new prominence in domestic worship due to the recent global pandemic. By examining the historical and current role of worship spaces among Coptic Christians, Makary aims to shed light on the importance of these spaces in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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