

COPTIC ART

Coptic [art](#) is a distinctive art associated with Christianity in Egypt. It is the richest [art](#) of the Eastern Christian arts. It appeared in the third or fourth century and began to flourish in the fifth century. Coptic [art](#) can only be understood and appreciated in the light of Egypt's economic and social circumstances over the centuries. Lacking royal patronage, it is perhaps best characterized as folk art.

Various stages of evolution between pagan [art](#) and Coptic art are recognizable, especially in the fourth and fifth centuries. Coptic [art](#) has been influenced by Greco-Roman art. Mythological scenes and decorative elements, such as vine scrolls and interlaced patterns, were taken from pagan art. The iconography of the majority of the Christian themes derives from early Christian and Byzantine traditions.

The styles and fashions of the Byzantine world were adapted with originality and individuality. Some of the motifs, such as the looped cross and the Holy Virgin suckling the Child Christ, reveal ancient Egyptian influence.

The **White Monastery** demonstrates affinities with ancient Egyptian temple architecture. By the 10th century, Coptic ornamentation began to assume an Islamic flavor. Scenes from the New Testament are very popular, especially episodes of the **Christological** cycle.

Coptic **liturgy** influenced church decoration during medieval times. Scenes from the Old Testament, such as Abraham's sacrifice and his meeting with Melchizedec, decorate the sanctuary because of their reference to the Eucharist. **Saints** occur often in mural paintings. Coptic [art](#) is primarily decorative art and very rich in its geometric and floral designs. Coptic churches, ancient and modern, are decorated with **icons**, wall paintings, carved wood, and architectural sculptures. A considerable part of the images in the Coptic Church has a function within the church

building and the liturgy.

Excavations of the **monasteries of St. Jeremiah** at Saqqara and **St. Apollo at Bawit**, yielded architectural [sculptures](#) and wall paintings of the sixth and seventh centuries that belong to the most important monuments of Christian art. The new discoveries of wall paintings in the **monasteries of the Syrians** and the Archangel Gabriel have enriched Coptic art, especially of the 8th through the 11th centuries. The 12th and the 13th centuries witnessed the creation of huge Coptic wall paintings in the monasteries of **Wadi al-Natrun** and the **monasteries of St. Antony** and **St. Paul**, and in some churches of Old Cairo.

In the 13th century, Cairo was the center of a workshop of Christian painters of several Christian communities, such as Armenians and Syrians. They were responsible for the painting of icons, wall paintings, and manuscript illumination, which attest to the survival of Coptic [art](#) in the narrower sense of a purely Christian art in the service of the Church. The [art](#) of wall painting [ceased](#) for a few centuries and appeared again in the 18th century in the Monastery of St. Paul. Beginning in the same century, icon paintings and manuscript illumination flourished. **Contemporary Coptic art** began and flourished in the second half of the 20th century.

Although the majority of Coptic churches and monasteries were demolished and a considerable number of them suffered many waves of persecution in medieval times—when much of their beautiful original murals, woodwork, icons, and valuable liturgical objects were destroyed or plundered by the mobs under Muslim rulers—what remains of the elaborate wooden altars, ciboria, doors, and screens, as well as beautiful objects of metal such as lamps, chandeliers, [Bible](#) caskets, and censers is beyond estimation.

[GAWDAT GABRA](#)



Tags: [Heritage](#)