

TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

A subject of rich Christian significance and the theme of a tapestry in the collection of Coptic textiles in the Louvre. About 4 feet (1.20 meters) high and 6.8 feet (2.10 meters) long, it was created in the technique of “looped” fabric, which produced a relief effect. This tapestry has suffered some damage, though the highly colored essentials of the subject have not been affected.

The tapestry sets the glorious exaltation of the cross in an [Old Testament](#) context. The design is divided horizontally into two registers. The lower register is a full-length picture of Eden. At the sides, on either side of two bushes, wild and domestic [animals](#) play together (Is. 11:6), leaving room in the center for the Iranian tree of life. The tree is on the same axis as a *crux ansata*—descended from the [pharaonic](#) sign of life (ANKH)—in the center of the upper register.

The loop that surmounts the two crossed [branches](#) of this emblem is [conceived](#) as a crown of laurel, dotted with [precious](#) stones and containing a star formed of two intersecting squares. On either side a decorated column separates the tree from two scenes oriented toward it. On the left, very incomplete, is a donkey advancing toward a peacock, from whose beak hangs a small *crux ansata*; the scene suggests the prophecy of Balaam (Nm. 24:17), which would be confirmed by the star integrated into the central *crux ansata*.

On the right, Jonah, duly identified by an inscription above his head and rising as an [orant](#) from the *ketos* (sea creature) under the trunk and fruit of the castor tree, is the manifest sign of the resurrection of Christ (Mt. 12:40).

The tapestry thus depicts the [Triumph](#) of the Cross, arising out of the entire [Old Testament](#) history of salvation and, through the tree of life in the earthly paradise, linking it to the heavenly Jerusalem, just as by its

form it transports the whole of the [pharaonic](#) past heavenward.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PIERRE DU BOURGUET, S. J.

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