The Art of Burial in the Medieval Nile Valley: Christian and Islamic Interchange in Religious Funerary Contexts

Arielle Winnik
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The Art of Burial in the Medieval Nile Valley: Christian and Islamic Interchange in Religious Funerary Contexts

By

Arielle Winnik

2022

Submitted to the Faculty of Bryn Mawr College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of the History of Art

Doctoral Committee:
Alicia Walker, Advisor
Sylvia Houghteling
Homay King
Elizabeth S. Bolman, Case Western Reserve University
Abstract

Christian communities in medieval Islamic Egypt (ca. ninth to twelfth centuries) were active participants in Islamicate visual culture. Indeed, Christians employed the same artistic objects as their Muslim neighbors in secular contexts, and close commonalities were even pervasive in art employed in religious rituals.

This dissertation investigates one such instance of the shared use of objects between Christians and Muslims in distinct sacred contexts. Christian and Muslim burials shared deep similarities, including the use of burial shrouds and grave markers with almost identical iconographic and compositional features. I draw attention to ways that Christians deployed an interreligious visual and material culture to communicate unique social and theological values.

While medieval Christianity and Islam shared a belief in bodily resurrection, their conceptions of the state between death and resurrection differed fundamentally. Islamic doctrine maintained that deceased individuals remained sentient and suffered “tortures of the grave,” including decaying flesh, crumbling bones, and agonizing loneliness. In contrast, Christians believed that the dead were impervious to the hardships of burial. Christian souls separated from the confinement of interred corpses and existed in an extrasensory paradise, joining the otherworldly community of Christian dead.

Over three parts, focusing on 1) wall paintings depicting the blessed in heaven and damned in hell; 2) garments shrouding deceased bodies; and 3) grave markers where mourners congregated, I argue that these differences in belief concerning the circumstances of the dead shaped the meanings of funerary objects in significant ways. Christians adapted visual and
material features of funerary objects that originally served Islamic doctrine in order to accommodate Christian beliefs. At the same time, burial objects held meanings that were common to Muslims and Christians, including the expression of a shared culture of social prestige.
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INTRODUCTION

Shared Objects and the Subtleties of Meaning

In the burial pit in the town of Naqlun in the Fayyum Oasis (Middle Egypt), the man and the woman were buried together.¹ They lay to rest in a family mausoleum attached to the southeastern end of a graveyard church. Inside the 8.5 square meter chamber, within the same pit, lay their separate coffins. Each body was swathed in an inscribed fabric covering and strewn with an array of leaves and flowers. The coffins were placed on a reed mat and wrapped—together—with another covering. Inside the caskets, the deceased individuals each wore sumptuous shrouds embroidered with Arabic script. The woman also wore a crown of plaited palm leaves atop her head. The man’s coffin held two glass bottles surrounded by basketry, an elaborate pen case and two reed pens. He was buried with a leather codex of the Gospel of John in the Coptic language with tooled decoration of decorative crosses. Remarkably, his name, Botros, is inscribed in the codex, as well as the date of its production (1099-1100 CE).² The dated codex suggests that the deceased were buried during the era of the Fatimid Caliphate (969-1171), a Shi’i Islamic empire based in Cairo, Egypt.³

³ The religion of Islam has two major sects: Sunnis and Shi’is. The divide traces back to a disagreement over the rightful successor of the Prophet Muhammad. This culminated in the Battle of Karbala in 680, in which Ali, whom those who became known as Shi’is believed should be caliph, was killed by the ruling Caliph Yazid I, whose supporters became known as Sunnis.
The material culture of the burials reveals a great deal of information about the deceased. Based on the location of the burial in Naqlun in the Fayum region and the Coptic language of the Gospel of John, it is clear that they are Coptic Christians, members of the Miaphysite Christian sect based in Egypt. Many elements of the burial—such as the mausoleum, the luxurious textiles, the codex—demonstrate that the deceased were elite and wealthy. The floral elements, including the crown of palm leaves, recall long-standing burial traditions in Egypt, having been included in internments from centuries and even millennia earlier – of the Pharaonic (3150 BCE-332 BCE), Hellenistic (332-BCE-30 BCE), Roman (30-BCE-330 CE), and Byzantine (330 CE-641 CE) eras – including those at Naqlun as well as other locales in Egypt.

The reed-wrapped glass bottles connect the individuals to others buried in the same cemetery; these vessels were common in burials of individuals of various levels of wealth at Naqlun. Glass of the Fatimid era could be highly decorative. These examples are simple and quotidian. On the other hand, the codex indicates the deceased man’s wealth, and the pen case and pen may signify his profession. Finally, the reeds mats and fine shrouds call to mind the individuals’ participation in the larger culture of Fatimid Egypt. They are each embroidered in script in Arabic, the colloquial language of Egypt in this period. Arabic was originally associated with Islam but by the Fatimid period was spoken by members of various religions. The textiles are known as tiraz, textiles traditionally inscribed with the name of the caliph that originally served as robes of honor, expressing political status as a preferred subject of the ruler. In

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4 On the term “Copt,” see below.
7 On a similar pen case from another burial at Naqlun, see Włodzimierz Godlewski, “Naqlun (Nekloni) season 2004,” Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 16 (2004): 183.
medieval Egypt, though *tiraz* was no longer produced only as robes of honor, the textiles still signaled social status and prestige. With objects signaling religious, social, and communal identity, the burials are a fascinating example of Coptic Christian practices of their era.

**Coptic Christian Burial Culture**

There is no one paradigm for Coptic Christian burials in the medieval Nile Valley, perhaps because so few complete burials have been excavated according to modern archaeological methods that fully document context. However, objects from burials with documented context – and objects without known context that are inscribed and therefore are known to have come from Christian burials of this period – reveal significant patterns. In all burials, various features emphasize aspects of the deceased individuals’ and their communities’ identities. In the Naqlun burials, some features emphasize longstanding traditions. Other features appear to be distinctly local (although further excavations at other sites may produce relevant comparanda), and yet other features emphasize individual identity. Some features, however, are found throughout vast regions, displaying a broader identity that even crosses religious and cultural boundaries.

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the meanings of such artistic features across a vast geographical range and in different religious settings. In the medieval Nile Valley, several types of burial objects, such as the *tiraz* shrouds wrapping Botros and his female companion, were commonly employed from the Nile Delta of Lower Egypt to the banks of Lower Nubia, some 800 km away. These features were also present in the burials of members of different religious groups, including Christians and both Sunni and Shi’i Muslims. The

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8 On this point, see Frances Pritchard, *Clothing Culture: Dress in Egypt in the First Millennium AD* (Manchester: Whitworth Gallery, 2006), 15-16, who notes that, while early excavations yielding late antique and medieval Egyptian textiles often focused on burial sites, most contemporary excavations of this material instead investigate rubbish heaps in city contexts.
compositions, styles, and iconographies of these objects evince deeply entwined transregional, cross-confessional, and intersectarian interaction. Moreover, the distinct sacred contexts in which the objects were found—in burials of various religious groups—opens deep questions about their meanings and functions, because the different religions had markedly different conceptions of the afterlife.

Both medieval Christianity and Islam shared a belief in bodily resurrection, but their conceptions of the intermediate state between death and Resurrection were fundamentally different. Islamic doctrine maintained that deceased individuals remained sentient and suffered so-called “tortures of the grave,” including decaying flesh, crumbling bones, and agonizing loneliness. In contrast, Copts—like Christians throughout the medieval world—believed that the dead were impervious to the hardships of burial. Christian souls separated from the confinement of interred corpses and existed in an extrasensory paradise, joining the otherworldly community of the Christian dead. I propose that these differences in belief concerning the circumstances of the dead shaped the meanings of funerary goods in significant and distinct ways. In Islamic burials, objects typically served to comfort or facilitate intercession with the deceased, while the same “things” in Coptic contexts instead reflected the deceased’s social position by emphasizing their identity in the earthly community (e.g., child, layman, priest). Both Coptic Christians and Muslims adapted visual and material features of funerary objects that originally served other religions’ doctrines in order to accommodate Christian beliefs. At the same time, burial objects could hold meanings that were common to Muslims and Christians, including the expression of a shared culture of social prestige.

Historical and Cultural Context

Christianity arrived in the Nile Valley at an early date and spread rapidly. While Egyptian Christians trace their roots to the evangelism of St. Mark (c. 12-68 CE), the earliest physical evidence of Christians (or Judeo-Christians) in Egypt dates to the second century CE. At the time of the advent and initial spread of Christianity, Egypt was part of the Roman Empire, which scholars conventionally refer to as the Byzantine Empire (or Roman-Byzantine Empire) after the transfer of the capital to Constantinople in 330 CE. In this early period, Egyptian Christianity was of the same sect as that which was practiced throughout the empire. Egypt was also integrated into the early Christian Church’s hierarchy, which included patriarchs in Alexandria (Egypt), Antioch, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Rome. The fifth century, however, saw a Christological crisis about the human and divine natures of Christ. At the council of Chalcedon (in Asia Minor) in 451, the Church formally adopted the belief that Christ was of two natures: human and divine. The Egyptian representatives from Alexandria, however, disagreed with this creed, eventually leading to a sectarian split and the development of two separate churches in Egypt. One, still led by the bishops of Alexandria, was Miaphysite (meaning, “one nature,” i.e., that the Church rejected the creed of the Council of Chalcedon). This sect eventually became known as the Coptic Church. The second church in Egypt remained part of the so-called Orthodox sect of the Byzantium, based in Constantinople, the capital of the Empire. The members of this Church were Dyophysites (meaning “two natures,” i.e., that they accepted the creed of the Council Chalcedon). In Egypt, these Orthodox Christians were known as Melkite

Christians, from the Semetic root M-L-K, meaning “royal” or “imperial” and thus linked to the Byzantine imperial church.\footnote{For more on this history, see, e.g., Otto F.A. Meinardus, \textit{Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity} (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999).}

In the seventh century, the Sassanian Persian Empire conquered Egypt, and ruled over the territory for a period of ten years (619-629). Shortly thereafter, the Byzantine Empire reconquered the region. The religion of Islam was established in the Hejaz region of the Arabian Peninsula in the early seventh century by the Prophet Muhammad. After the death of the Prophet in 632, the successors of the Prophet, known as the Rashidun (rightly guided) caliphate, captured a great deal of territory beyond the Hejaz, including the entirety of the Sassanian Empire and much of the eastern part of the Byzantine Empire (\textbf{Figure 2}). This included Egypt, which they ruled from 641 to 661, conquering the region only a few decades after the Byzantines had regained it from the Sasanians. In the following centuries, a series of Islamic empires ruled over Egypt beginning with the Sunni Umayyads (661-750). They were followed by the Sunni Abbasids (750-969), who were more symbolic sovereigns than rulers on the ground; over the 200 years the Abbasids controlled Egypt, a series of local leaders governed in their name. Some of these client rulers, such as the Tulunids (868-905) and the Ikhshidids (935-969), declared independence from the Abbasids. The Shi’i Fatimids (969-1171) claimed Egypt as part of their larger campaign to establish an independent caliphate in competition with the Abbasids. After a period of political corruption and decline, the Fatimids were displaced by the Sunni Ayyubid Sultanate (1171-1250), which was founded by Saladin, the famed Islamic general who successful defeated Western Crusader armies in the Holy Land.

At the time of the Islamic conquest of Egypt, the vast majority of Egyptians were Christian. Their numbers decreased throughout the medieval period, but it is unclear precisely
when and why conversions occurred. Mark N. Swanson marks the ninth and the twelfth centuries as times when circumstances may have made it expedient for Christians to convert to Islam. He provides material evidence, such as contracts and epitaphs, which attest to conversion and intermarriage. Some demographic evidence exists for the numbers of Christians in the medieval Fayum region (central Egypt). The Banu Bifam archive (consisting of fifty Arabic contracts, letters, and deeds) shows that in the early 1000s the residents of the village Damuya were almost all Christian. However, by 1245, poll tax records show that this village was inhabited entirely by Muslims.

The Term “Copt”

This dissertation discusses material known (or strongly believed) to have been used by Coptic Christians. The term “Copt” is thought to originate from the root consonants of the Greek term for Egyptian, Ἄιγυπτιος. The term may have come into use in the early Islamic period, when it would have held an ethno-geographic meaning, distinguishing local Egyptians from Arab newcomers. Over time, it became associated with the Christian minority population of Egypt in contrast to the Muslim majority; European crusaders of the thirteenth century and travelers of the late sixteenth century referred to Egyptian Christians as Coptic. In this sense, according to Pierre du Bourguet, the term Coptic is “inseparably ethnic and Christian.”

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15 Du Bourguet, “Copt.”
16 Du Bourguet, “Copt.”
When referring to the arts and artifacts of late antiquity, the term Coptic is controversial because scholars now understand the material culture of the pre-Islamic period, whether made and used by Miaphysites or Dyophysites, to be Byzantine. This means that, despite having been found in Egypt, the arts of this era are understood to be part of the artistic tradition of the Byzantine Empire.\textsuperscript{17} For this reason, when referring to the arts of the pre-Islamic and very early Islamic period, I do not use the term “Coptic,” but instead say “late antique Christian,” “Christian Egyptian,” or “Byzantine Christian,” depending on the context. However, by the medieval period on which this dissertation focuses (ninth-thirteenth century), Egypt was no longer a part of the Byzantine Empire, even if Christians maintained some cultural and artistic ties. For this reason, scholars such as Elizabeth S. Bolman propose to call Christians from the late ninth century onwards “Coptic,” since by that period a strong Arabization of Egypt had begun.\textsuperscript{18} Endorsing this position, I refer to the people and their arts discussed in this dissertation as “Coptic.” Moreover, the dissertation focuses on Miaphysite Christians, who eventually became known as Coptic. The dissertation accomplishes this by considering texts and materials from sites known to have been used by Miaphysite Christians.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} For a critique of the term “Byzantine” for the late antique and medieval Eastern Roman Empire, see, Elizabeth Bolman, Anthony Kaldelis, Leonora Neville, and Alexander Tudorie, “Is It Time to De-Colonize the Terms ‘Byzantine’ and ‘Byzantium’?,” The Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University, October 7, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMIwE3DoU3U.


\textsuperscript{19} I note, however, that some of the unattributed materials (particularly the shrouds with Coptic inscriptions discussed in Chapter Three and some of the tombstones discussed in Chapter Five) could have belonged to Melkite Christians.
Islamic Art in the Medieval Nile Valley

The medieval Nile Valley was a vibrant, diverse region, with communities of Miaphysite and Dyophysite Christians, Sunni and Shi’i Muslims, and Jews.\(^{20}\) Scholars show that members of these communities employed similar material culture in daily life. For example, Yedida Kalfon Stillman demonstrates that Christians, Muslims, and Jews wore everyday clothing that was indistinguishable and that sumptuary regulations distinguishing religious groups were rarely enforced.\(^{21}\) Material culture employed in Christian religious settings was also often similar to Islamic examples. Adeline Jeudy shows that the carved woodwork that formed the fittings of churches in Cairo and beyond was indistinguishable from those of Egyptian mosques and may even have been produced by the same artisans.\(^{22}\) Similarly, Mat Immerzeel argues that the tenth-century stuccowork in the church of Deir al-Surian, in Wadi Natrun (Lower Egypt), emulated the stuccowork of the late ninth-century mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo.\(^{23}\)

In their work on the Church of St. Antony, in the Monastery of St. Antony (by the Red Sea), Elizabeth S. Bolman and William Lyster show that the ceiling vault of a part of the church employed non-figural paintings

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\(^{20}\) Discussion of the Jewish population is not included in this dissertation because of the emphasis of this project is visual and material sources. I am not aware of any extant burial objects from the Nile Valley from the period 800-1300 that are reliably attributed to the Jewish population. However, there are extant texts discussing Jewish burials, including material from the Cairo genizah, a trove of over 300,000 documents found in the Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo. On material in the genizah, see, e.g., S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: An Abridgment in One Volume*, ed. Jacob Lassner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).


that called upon an interreligious style that was also employed in Islamic spaces and communicated luxury and prestige.\textsuperscript{24}

Despite these similarities in both quotidian and sacred contexts, Coptic Christians did not blindly follow their neighbors’ artistic styles. As Bolman demonstrates, the Christians of the medieval Nile Valley had several styles to choose from when decorating their churches. For example, the Church of St. Antony employs and, in some cases, synthesizes, three different styles—one evoking the longstanding Christian tradition in Egypt, another assimilating to pan-religious artistic styles known throughout the Islamic world, a third emphasizing to the Byzantine tradition through links to Byzantine Cyprus—each intentionally deployed by the patrons to evoke particular meaning.\textsuperscript{25} Bolman similarly shows that paintings from the medieval phase of occupation of the church of the Red Monastery (a part of the White Monastery Federation), employ styles associated with the Syrian artistic tradition, Armenian art, the arts of the larger Islamic world, and local Coptic tradition.\textsuperscript{26} Recent scholarship shows, then, that Christians could choose to emphasize a uniquely Christian heritage, engage with the arts of Christian sects beyond the Nile Valley, and assimilate with the broader Islamic culture of Egypt—sometimes all at once.

When speaking of arts of Islamic Egypt, this dissertation adopts the term “Islamicate,” coined by Marshal Hodgson in volume 1 of his 1974 book, *The Venture of Islam*. Hodgson coined this neologism in order to distinguish the religion of Islam in its sacred and spiritual dimensions (i.e., Islamic) from the socio-cultural phenomena that transpired under Islamic hegemony but were not a part of the religion (i.e., Islamicate). Something “Islamicate,” Hodgson writes, “would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.” He defines the difference between “Islamic” and “Islamicate” art as being defined by context: in his classification, mosques are “Islamic,” whereas the imagery in a medical handbook is “Islamicate,” although he notes, “there is admittedly no sharp boundary between.” In this dissertation burial art employing features derived from Islamic beliefs and practices is “Islamic” when employed in the burial of a Muslim, but “Islamicate” when employed in a Christian burial. As such, the dissertation adds to the important work of defining Islamicate art. I show that Coptic Christians could employ styles and object types of Islamic art in order to assimilate with Islamicate hegemonic culture while also adapting these models to create and express meanings of distinctly Christian import.

**Method: From Cross-Cultural to Intra-Societal Exchange**

In recent decades, art historians have explored how cross-cultural encounters affected the production and appearance of art and architecture in the medieval world. In these studies,

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scholars have discussed how patrons and artists consciously adopted artistic elements associated with “foreign” cultures in order to convey particular meaning. Robert S. Nelson’s definition of “appropriation” provides an example of how material could be produced and interpreted in a cross-cultural framework. Another efficacious method for thinking about cross-cultural encounters is through the discourse of hybridity, discussed by the theorist Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha writes of the “interstices” between cultures. In this “third space,” communities negotiate alterity and assimilation, leading to hybrid identities and forms. Yet scholars also problematize these models for interpreting the arts of the premodern world, noting that viewers may not have interpreted non-indigenous elements as foreign, or not understood their connections to particular foreign cultures.

Methods created and adopted specifically for medieval Islamicate art are especially fruitful for this study. In his book, Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter, Finbarr Barry Flood discusses how material culture was culturally “translated” between various groups of Hindus and Muslims of medieval South Asia. Flood’s study follows prior work in the humanities that employs the concept of “translation” to move beyond, he says, “the strictly linguistic to other fields of cultural production, embracing transla-


32 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 2012).


tion as both an explanatory metaphor and a dynamic practice through which the circulation, mediation, reception, and transformation of distinct cultural forms and practices is effected.”

Flood employs a modified version of the concept of “transculturaltion,” the term coined by Fernando Ortiz, looking at, he explains, “cultural formations [as] always already hybrid and in process, so that translation is a dynamic activity that takes place both between and within cultural codes, forms, and practices.” The present study embraces this approach, focusing on the transcultural processes of identity formation within medieval Egypt, among Christians and Muslim living under Islamic hegemony.

A key medium for the expression of Islamic hegemony in medieval Egypt was language. Arabic was both the sacred and colloquial language of the caliphates, but non-Muslims employed Arabic as their colloquial language as well. This complex linguistic environment has been productively analyzed by Irene Bierman, whose concept of the “contextual reading” of “textual communities” serves as a useful paradigm for this study. While Flood employs methods of translation taken from linguistic disciplines and applies them to material culture, Bierman focuses her study on epigraphy, or “public text,” but does not look at linguistic translation. Instead, she concentrates on the ways that different communities would have accessed and interpreted the same inscriptions. Focusing on official inscriptions in Fatimid Egypt, Bierman argues that material culture was often interpreted by different individuals and groups in different ways. “Meaning,” she writes, “as understood here is not completely contained in the writing itself but, rather, grows in the web of contextual relationships woven between the official writing, the patrons, the range of beholders, and the established contexts in which that writing

35 Flood, Objects of Translation, 8.
36 Flood, Objects of Translation, 9.
was placed.”\textsuperscript{37} Bierman identifies three “functions” of official Fatimid script. The “territorial function,” she notes, is the way in which writing strengthened communal identity while also emphasizing alterity from other groups. The “referential function” is the content of an inscription, its semantic meaning. Finally, the “aesthetic function” refers to the formal, material, and compositional elements of an inscription, that is to say, its style.\textsuperscript{38} These functions can be applied to other art forms, both official and unofficial, in the medieval Nile Valley.

Most art historical scholarship employing cross-cultural analysis focuses on encounters between distinct cultures that were geographically separated for some time before meeting in new or different circumstances. In contrast, this dissertation focuses on religious groups living side by side for centuries and participating in the same broader society. This type of encounter, which I term “intra-societal,” necessitates a revision of prior methods. In practice, this means that while concepts of appropriation and hybridity are still relevant, the so-called purity of “original” cultural forms must be rigorously denounced. In an intra-societal encounter, cultural forms exist both in alterity and purity at the same time. Often, the only differences are of context and interpretation. In other words, identical objects and iconography can hold distinct meanings solely because they are employed in different contexts.

\textbf{Chronological and Geographical Range of this Dissertation}

The chronological range of this dissertation is based on materials, not dynasties. It is roughly between the years 800 and 1300 that both Christian and Islamic burials from various locales in Egypt and beyond began to exhibit almost identical features in the textiles that surrounded bodies

\textsuperscript{38} Bierman, \textit{Writing Signs}, 16-20.
and the ways the graves were marked. These dates do not follow dynastic changes, which indicates how little the material culture of religious practice—of both average and elite individuals—was impacted by dynastic change in the medieval Nile Valley. The lack of coincidence between patterns in the material culture of religious life and cycles of Islamic dynasties that is witnessed in this dissertation follows similar patterns noted in work by scholars of Islamic art of various contexts and media in the same era.39

Likewise, the geographic range of the dissertation is defined by material rather than political boundaries. While most of the material covered in the dissertation was employed in burials within the borders of the caliphates and sultanates of Egypt, some material from Nubia, to the south of Egypt, is included as well. This is because the objects in Nubia are identical to the Egyptian examples, evincing the close cultural and economic relationships between the two regions. In the sixth century, as legend would have it, Christianity entered the Nubian states of Nobatia (Lower or Northern Nubia) and Makuria (Upper or Southern Nubia) via an embassy from the court of the Byzantine emperor Justinian (r. 527-565). From that time, Christianity flourished in the region, although it is unclear whether Nubian Christians practiced Miaphysite or Dyophysite Christianity, and what the relationship of the local Church or Churches was to the Byzantine and/or Coptic Churches. By the seventh century, Makuria appears to have taken possession of Nobatia, although the precise manner in which this annexation transpired is unknown. In the later period, the kings and bishops of Makuria practiced Miaphysiste

Christianity and were officially under the ecclesiastical organization of the Coptic Church and its Patriarchate. Indeed, many, though not all, of the bishops of the Nubian Church were appointed from Egypt. However, Nubian Christianity maintained its own traditions and practices. The inclusion of material from Nubian burials does not aim to claim that Nubian Christianity was entirely the same as Coptic Christianity. Instead, this dissertation is actively engaged with the process of defining the complex relationship between these interconnected regions.

Just as the Christian communities were closely engaged, the economies of Egypt and Nubia were intertwined. For over half a millennium, from the Islamic conquest of Egypt of 641-646 until the arrival of the Ayyubid Sultanate in the Nile Valley 1171, Islamic Egypt and Christian Nubia had a treaty known as the baqt (from the Greek πάκτον), in which the polities exchanged economic goods and maintained their hegemonic religions. According to the baqt, Muslims were not allowed to settle permanently in Nubia. However, it is evident that many Muslim traders passed through and even lived in Nubia. Their material culture, including their material culture of burial, engaged closely with that of their Christian neighbors. Like Egypt, medieval Nubia was a dynamic society in which material crossed purported cultural and religious boundaries.

Organization and Chapter Summaries

The dissertation beings with an investigation of the theology of the afterlife in the medieval Coptic tradition. I ground my study in pictorial evidence, namely, painted decoration of the

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khurus (a transverse space in front of the altar room that symbolized the heavenly garden where righteous Christians awaited the Resurrection after death) of Coptic churches. Copts painted the khurus with imagery that evoked the physical and metaphorical characteristics of this garden. The primary case study explored in this section is the thirteenth-century khurus of the Monastery of Saint Antony near the Red Sea, because it is particularly well studied and conserved. The khurus includes an image of the blessed on the bosoms of the Patriarchs, awaiting the Resurrection in heaven. The scale of the image and vitality of its figures transports its audience to the celestial garden. Much of the iconography in the khurus, including depictions of the Patriarchs in paradise, is not unique to Egypt. These images survive in dozens of wall paintings and manuscript illuminations from throughout the Mediterranean world, including Byzantium and Western Europe. I combine my interpretation of images with analysis of textual evidence, including theological treatises, hagiography, and epitaphs, to interpret both official and popular conceptions of the afterlife.

Chapter One, “An Image of the Patriarchs in Paradise in the Monastery of St. Antony near the Red Sea: Time and Space in the Coptic Iconography of Salvation,” investigates the meaning of time and space in medieval Christian thought, as related to conceptions of the afterlife, and how this was expressed visually. I take a comparative approach, showing that Coptic Christians created an iconography of time and space that emphasized their links to the larger oikoumene (οἰκουμένη, literally, “the inhabited world,” a term referring to the pan-regional sphere in which Christian sacraments were performed). This imagery emphasized a paradoxical conception of time and space in which life on earth, the experience of the intermediate state between death and resurrection, and the Heavenly Kingdom of the post-apocalyptic period prefigured one another.
Chapter Two, “Experiencing Heaven and Hell: The Materiality of the Intermediate State in Medieval Christian and Islamic Traditions,” focuses on the perceived materiality of the afterlife in medieval Christian and Islamic thought. While the prior chapter emphasizes continuity among Christian sects, this chapter highlights differences. I show that, while Latin and Byzantine Christians often visualized a materialist view of the afterlife, Coptic Christians imagined the intermediate state as having its own heavenly materiality and sensorium that were distinct from earthly conceptions and emphatically non-corporeal. In particular, Coptic Christians had strong distinctions in beliefs about the afterlife from their Muslim neighbors, who held a highly material, bodily conception of the intermediate state.

I next investigate how Copts visually and materially articulated these distinct beliefs in funerary contexts. Over three chapters, I discuss two categories of visual culture shared across faiths: shrouds and grave markers. Chapter Three, “Beauty, Prestige, and Belief: *Tiraz* Textiles in Coptic Graves,” focuses on shrouds with *tiraz* inscriptions in Arabic. Scholars argue that the use of these textiles in burials was an Islamic innovation and served a Shi’i religious function because the Fatimid caliph, whose name was woven on the textiles, was a source of *baraka* (blessing, بركة) in Shi’i thought. These shrouds protected corpses from the dangers of burial and decomposition. In Coptic burials, *tiraz* shrouds could not have served this exact purpose because Christians rejected materialist conceptions of the intermediate state, believing that deceased individuals did not suffer in the grave. Comparison of *tiraz* from these distinct religious contexts reveals differences in function. As an example, I study the burial of a high-ranking ecclesiastic buried at the Nubian cemetery of Qasr Ibrim (in southern Egypt, about 825 km from

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Cairo) alongside that of a Muslim official interred at Istabl Antar (the burial compound of the Fatimid rulers located in Fustat, near Cairo). The two men were buried in almost identical tiraz shrouds. Yet the bishop also wore vestments denoting his ecclesiastical rank. The components of his burial emphasized political, ecclesiastical, and economic status; their use together suggested that these categories of prestige magnified one another.

In other contexts, however, Coptic Christians modified tiraz for distinct cultural and theological practices. Chapter Four, “Wrapped in Community and Tradition: Textiles with Christian Inscriptions in Medieval Egypt,” investigates a group of shrouds from the Fayum that substitute Coptic and Greek inscriptions for Arabic. I undertake a comprehensive analysis of this material to understand how the Greek and Coptic-inscribed examples imitated and/or diverged from Arabic–inscribed textiles. I show that these Greek- and Coptic-inscribed textiles translated tiraz not only in the language of the inscription, but also in the meaning of the objects in a burial context. While Arabic language tiraz in Islamic graves aimed to provide the deceased with blessing, the Christian examples called attention to the deceased’s position in the Christian community, both on earth and in the afterlife.

Chapter Five, “Christian and Islamic Grave Makers: Visitation, Community, and the Afterlife in the Medieval Nile Valley,” explores grave markers, which, like shrouds, attest to a common visual culture between Coptic Christians and Muslims of the Nile Valley. Funerary sculptures exhibit shared visual iconographic and compositional features, including similar shapes, architectural motifs, and large blocks of text. I employ a surviving corpus of over 4,000 extant medieval Egyptian Christian and Islamic stelae in order to compare formal and conceptual features among these objects. I show that in the centuries following the Islamic conquest of Egypt, some Muslims employed the formal and compositional elements of Christian tombstones
as prototypes but translated the iconography, language, and content of the inscriptions in order to fit Islamic doctrine and visitation practices. As tombstones following Islamic practices became the norm, Christians then assimilated to these visual aspects, such as compositional and stylistic aspects, but maintained uniquely Christian language and content of the inscriptions. This suggests that, in medieval Egypt, iconography, style, and composition were deemed adaptable, whereas the content and language of writing was not.

My study shows that in burial contexts, Coptic Christians employed various strategies to assert their identity in the larger Islamicate society while still maintaining the requirements of their systems of belief. Whether through assimilation, alterity, translation, or reinterpretation, the funerary art of medieval Coptic Christians expressed both their participation in Islamicate society and their status as members of a non-hegemonic religion.
Part I

Depicting Afterlife in Coptic Art and Text
The wall painting of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony is imposing (Figure 3). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob convene on an intricately carved throne with embroidered cushions. They are draped in swaths of patterned garments in tones of crimson and gold. Their feet rest on intricate footstools. The setting is a garden. Leafy trees, bursting with fruit, reach from behind the throne. Childlike figures, who represent the blessed souls, enjoy the lush surrounds. Some of them are enfolded in the arms of the patriarchs, and others dance among the trees. They pull fruit from the branches and bring it to their mouths. Like the Patriarchs, the figures are draped in vividly colored crimson and gold garments. To the left of the scene, a solitary figure stands, surrounded by fire. He is unclothed, the only richness in his milieu the bright flames that engulf him. This figure and his circumstances serve as a foil to the paradisical setting of the Patriarchs. He represents the damned, the souls who will not enjoy the spiritual pleasures of paradise.

Elizabeth S. Bolman’s observation that the conventions of Coptic art, in which line, color, and pattern saturate schematic compositions in order to portray “a strong sense of life and personality,” effectively captures the visual effects of this wall painting. This scene represents

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what awaits the blessed and the damned after death. In portraying the good fortune of the saved, the painting effectively communicates to viewers a nearly tangible material and sensorial opulence.

The image, a part of a larger wall painting program executed in 1232-1233, is situated on the west wall in the *khurus* (an architectural space between the sanctuary and nave, unique to Coptic churches) of the Church of St. Antony (located near the Red Sea). Devotees would stand looking upward at the Patriarchs, the painted figures almost life-sized and just a foot or so above the believers’ heads. The scale and position of the image create an immersive experience, which acts to make viewers feel as though they are transported to the realm of the Patriarchs. In contrast, the iconography—with the row of Patriarchs and their architectonic throne acting like a wall—separates devotees from the paradisical setting and casts the Patriarchs in the role of gatekeepers. While the Patriarchs appear to look forward, their pupils dart to the side and they resist eye contact with viewers (*Figure 4*). The scene invites believers to peer into the scene but prevents them from being transported to it. Much like the wretched inflamed soul to the right side of the image, the devout of this world are observers, not participants. They stare into another world of which they cannot yet be a part but which they anticipate.

This thirteenth-century painting in the Monastery of St. Antony is one of dozens of representations of the Patriarchs in paradise (or, in some cases, solely Abraham in paradise) in wall paintings and manuscript illuminations produced throughout the medieval Christian world, including in the Levant, Byzantium, and Western Europe. The subject of the scene would have been instantly recognizable to medieval Christian viewers. Images, epitaphs, liturgies, and

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44 While scholars once considered images featuring solely Abraham in paradise to be an earlier stage in a single pictorial tradition, Gertrud van Loon has proposed they were produced at the same time as images of all three Patriarchs, making these iconographic types parallel traditions. Gertrud van Loon, “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Paradise in Coptic Wall Painting,” *Visual Resources* 19.1 (2003): 74.
religious treatises indicate Christians expected that during the intermediate state between death and the Resurrection, the souls of the righteous rested in a celestial garden. This deeply held belief is expressed, for instance, in a prayer for the dead in the Coptic Liturgy of Saint Basil, which states that after death, the righteous will take refuge “in the bosoms of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Devotees at the Monastery of St. Antony peered into their hopeful future, an idyllic world they wished to join someday.

In this chapter, I investigate the Coptic iconography of salvation. I focus in particular on the intermediate state between death and Resurrection, the state of the soul while the body lay in the grave surrounded by the material culture of burial. This state is in contrast to the Heavenly Kingdom of the post-Apocalyptic period, following the Resurrection. While the medieval Coptic Church promoted no official doctrine on the afterlife, it is possible to glean widely held beliefs from these images as well as from official and popular texts. Because the Coptic church held no dogmatic conception of the afterlife, many ideas can be contradictory and ambiguous. I argue that written and material sources often employ this uncertainty rhetorically, so as to emphasize the esotericism of the afterlife and its incongruity with earthly concepts. In particular, I show that conceptions of time and space were paradoxical. Distinct realms such as the intermediate state between death and burial and the Heavenly Kingdom of the Apocalypse often prefigure each other and are portrayed as collapsed into a single, ambiguous sphere. While this chapter focuses on Coptic conceptions of time and space as related to the afterlife, it employs extensive comparison with the views of other Christian sects, illustrating a clear continuity of beliefs across the Christian oikoumene (community throughout world). I conclude that Coptic Christians

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in medieval Egypt fashioned and employed their iconography of salvation to express a communal identity and system of beliefs about time and space that linked them to the broader Christian world, emphasizing unity, rather than alterity, across the oikoumene. Indeed, images of the blessed in the Monastery of St. Antony were crucial expressions of these beliefs.

The Intermediate State in the Judeo-Christian Tradition

The image of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs traces back to the tale of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke, 16: 22-24). The rich man ignored the suffering of the beggar Lazarus, who was curled up, starving, and covered in sores, at his gate. When Lazarus died, he:

was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.”

The parable has been interpreted both as an allegory in service of a spiritual message and as reflective of beliefs about the afterlife. If interpreted as doctrine, the story shows that both Lazarus and the rich man experienced an afterlife in which they retained their unique personal identities. Lazarus was rewarded for his suffering, while the rich man was punished for lacking in generosity and ignoring the words of the Prophets. The parable has no precedent in the Rabbinic sources, but does have strong parallels to the Ancient Egyptian story of Satmi and

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Senosiris. In this story, Senosiris takes his father Satmi to the hereafter and shows him a rich man, tormented for bad deeds he committed in life, and a poor man, dressed in fine linen and accompanying the god Osiris. Senosiris explains that the poor man received the grave goods of the rich man in reward for his life of good deeds. The Egyptian roots of the Lazarus parable suggest that resonances of pre-Christian Egyptian traditions and coincidences of values in the ancient Egyptian and Christian traditions remained current in medieval Christian belief.

From the time of the codification of the Hebrew Bible in the ninth and tenth centuries BCE to the present day, the backbone of the eschatology of the three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—has been a sequence of death, intermediate state, and resurrection. Yet the Hebrew Bible provides little detail about the intermediate state. It describes that the departed go to Sheol (יוֹלֶדָן), which is usually translated as “Hades” (ᾍδης) in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, completed in the third to second century BCE). Sheol is an underworld, cut off from the God of the Jews and defined by darkness. It is more akin to the underworld of the ancient Greeks than to Hell in the Christian sense. It is the abode of both good and bad individuals, dispensing neither reward nor retribution. Instead, throughout most of the Hebrew Bible, divine retribution comes in the form of destruction of the living, for example, the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah (Ezekiel 16:48–50).

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passages of the Hebrew Bible, the afterlife is envisioned in less neutral terms.\textsuperscript{52} For the people of Korah’s rebellion (Numbers 16.31-40), \textit{Sheol} is a fiery punishment.\textsuperscript{53} Ezekiel (32.24) and Isaiah (14.15-20) envision \textit{Sheol} as hierarchically arranged, with, for example, a separate location for those who are shamed from being unburied.\textsuperscript{54} While some scholars argue that the Resurrection described in passages in Ezekiel and Daniel, among other books, conflicts with the conception of \textit{Sheol}, others see no contradiction, and classify \textit{Sheol} as the intermediate state.\textsuperscript{55}

The New Testament provides more details about the afterlife but focuses on the Resurrection and Last Judgment instead of the intermediate state.\textsuperscript{56} The Epistles of Paul (Corinthians 5:1) discuss the period between death and resurrection in vague terms. These writings imply, however, that there is no judgment of baptized Christians, who will all be saved.\textsuperscript{57} Paul writes (Corinthians 5:1) that Christians will have a house in heaven immediately following death.\textsuperscript{58} While Paul does not directly discuss punishment, focusing instead on the salvific power of Christ, he implies that the damned individuals simply cease to exist after death.\textsuperscript{59} As noted above, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke (16:22-24) is more direct. Luke envisions the realm of the intermediate state to be organized morally.

\textsuperscript{52} These passages are in the sections of the Hebrew Bible that were composed at a later point in the book’s history. However, Bernstein, \textit{The Formation of Hell}, 175, contends that conceptions of the afterlife did not evolve over time in a linear fashion. He notes that the Hebrew Bible “is composed of many strands, expressions, of religious sentiments that vary from person to person and age to age according to individual outlooks and changing circumstances. The advocacy of these tendencies…varied over the course of biblical composition.”

\textsuperscript{53} Bernstein, \textit{The Formation of Hell}, 145.

\textsuperscript{54} Bernstein, \textit{The Formation of Hell}, 165-167.


\textsuperscript{56} Jan M. Bremmer, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol} (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 57.

\textsuperscript{57} Brandon, \textit{The Judgment of the Dead}, 107.

\textsuperscript{58} Marinis, \textit{Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium}, 3.

\textsuperscript{59} Bernstein, \textit{The Formation of Hell}, 208.
The saved and the damned await the resurrection in different sections of a single—if vast—expanse, termed “Hades” (ᾍδης, as in the Septuagint).⁶⁰ The rich man sees Lazarus from across a great chasm.⁶¹ This moralized intermediate state, with different fates for the saved and damned, implies a provisional judgment immediately following death, at least for some individuals.⁶²

To many scholars, the intermediate state of the New Testament is defined by the immateriality of the individuals housed there.⁶³ These scholars emphasize that the New Testament articulates an anthropological dualism, with fleshy bodies distinct from ethereal souls.⁶⁴ For example, Mathew tells his followers not to fear “those that kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (10:28.).⁶⁵ After death, souls exit the body and enter the intermediate state. While the Lazarus parable is described in bodily terms, it is the souls of Lazarus and the rich man, rather than their bodies that receive punishment or reward.⁶⁶ This distinction is crucial, and yet complicated, in medieval Coptic thought and has important implications for the iconography of salvation.

The Early Church Fathers

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⁶¹ Osei-Bonsu, “The Intermediate State in the New Testament,” 175, suggests they should be understood as facing each other, as if positioned in contrast.
⁶² Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium*, 3.
Another important early source for Christian conceptions of the afterlife that persisted into the medieval period is Patristic writings. Late antique Egyptian Christians belonged to a church united across the Roman-Byzantine Empire until the Council of Chalcedon in 451, when they and other sects in the Levant and elsewhere split from Constantinople over a dispute regarding the nature of Christ.\(^\text{67}\) The formation of the Coptic Church as a doctrinally and administratively independent entity, separate from the so-called Byzantine Orthodox church, dates to this schism. For this reason, theologians of the early Christian Church are integral to Coptic ecclesiastical and doctrinal history. Some Patristic authors are even saints in the Coptic Church. Their influential writings were translated into Coptic and Arabic, copied actively, and explored by medieval Egyptian Christian theologians.

While these Church Fathers have varying conceptions of the precise relationship between body and soul, they tend to agree that souls separate from bodies after death, face a provisional judgment, and then spend the intermediate state in a Hades that is mapped according to a hierarchy based on moral merit. Caroline Walker Bynum has shown that the anthropology espoused by early Christian theologians was dualistic, proposing that individuals are formed of “a union of body and soul.”\(^\text{68}\) Early theologians, including Irenaeus (ca. 130-202), Bishop of Lyons, and Tertullian (ca. 155-240), who was based in Carthage, argue that body and soul separated at death. Although bodiless in the intermediate state, souls are nonetheless conscious and retained unique personal identities. But the deceased body is thought to maintain some aspects of the individual.\(^\text{69}\) Irenaeus sees the body as an inherent part of personhood.\(^\text{70}\)

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\(^\text{67}\) See the discussion in the introduction to this dissertation on the Council of Chalcedon.


Nevertheless, he acknowledges that disembodied souls in the intermediate state maintain their unique identities and memories.\textsuperscript{71} Tertullian defines death as “the separation of body and soul.”\textsuperscript{72} He believes that, in contrast to ephemeral, fleshly bodies, souls are immortal.\textsuperscript{73} Yet, according to Tertullian, souls are formed of matter, subtle particles with the ability to experience sensation.\textsuperscript{74}

Later authors emphasize the deep connection between body and soul. Some conceive of a body and soul that remain conjoined after death. In an extreme example, the theologian Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-395) suggests that body and soul do not separate at death. Instead, the soul continues to exist, even in a fractured and decomposed deceased body.\textsuperscript{75} The body itself, even when entirely decomposed, persists in a “potential” form.\textsuperscript{76} Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who promulgates the idea that souls separate from bodies at death, finds the body to be more essential than earlier authors, repeatedly stressing that the disembodied soul yearns for its corporeal


\textsuperscript{73} Bynum, \textit{Resurrection of the Body}, 36.


home. This enduring concern for the body’s fortunes after death is a hallmark of medieval Western Christian eschatology. These ideas do not persist, however, in the Coptic tradition. Patristic sources largely agree that the locus of the intermediate state, usually termed Hades, is mapped morally, with the blessed and the damned residing in different regions. Tertullian and Augustine locate Lazarus sheltering in the bosom of Abraham in the upper region of Hades and situate the scorching quarters of the rich man below. Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) believe the intermediate state to be a time of education, when the blessed achieve greater spiritual enlightenment and, according to Clement, sinners experience fiery purification. Athanasios of Alexandria (c. 296-373) and John Chrysostom (c. 349-407), Archbishop of Constantinople, profess that a provisional judgment takes place immediately following death.

The ideas described in the biblical tradition and in the early Patristic writers serve as the foundation for conceptions of the afterlife in the medieval Coptic tradition. Following their forebears, medieval Copts believed in an intermediate state between death and the Resurrection. The presence of different traditions about the afterlife that are seen in the pre-Christian and early Christian traditions also permeant later Coptic traditions. These variances, I show, are not merely indicative of confusion or theological disagreement. Indeed, I argue, medieval Coptic sources emphasize this discord to indicate the otherworldly nature of the hereafter, its total dissonance with the world of the living.

78 Bynum, Resurrection of the Body, 100.
The Patriarchs in Paradise: An Image of the Intermediate State

Keeping in mind the variations among Early Christian conceptions of the intermediate state discussed in the previous section, I turn now to Coptic sources. I treat texts and images as equally informative sources, an approach fruitfully employed in by Vasileios Marinis in his book on Byzantine conceptions of the afterlife.\textsuperscript{82} Many of the visual and textual sources considered here were produced in the medieval era (ca. ninth to thirteenth century), while others were produced earlier, but were “current” in that they continued to be discussed, copied, translated, or used in prayer or the liturgy during the medieval period. My study is indebted to the work of Father Gabriele Giamberardini, whose two-volume \textit{La Sorte dei Defunti nella Tradizione Copta} is a historical investigation that assembles dozens of Coptic and Copto-Arabic texts discussing the afterlife.\textsuperscript{83} I have supplemented these texts with pictorial sources, which do not feature at all in Giamberardini’s study, as well as with Coptic and Copto-Arabic texts that fall outside the purview of Giamberardini’s corpus. As I discuss in the following sections, many of these sources, both written and pictorial, do not aim to provide an exact picture of existence after death.\textsuperscript{84} They were not necessarily perceived as documentary; that is to say, audiences would not necessarily have believed that the precise details depicted in the sources would be encountered in the afterlife. However, the sources were not mere fairytales either. The general conceptions and

\textsuperscript{82} Marinis, \textit{Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium}.
\textsuperscript{84} Jane Baun, \textit{Tales from Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 30.
anxieties about what happened to body and soul after death can be seen to have been part of a multifaceted, esoteric system of belief that was of concern to theologians and ecclesiastics as much as to the laity.

The context and location of the image of the Three Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony suggests that medieval viewers would have primarily interpreted it as depicting the intermediate state between death and the Resurrection. There was a deliberate ambiguity inherent in the iconography, however, because this and similar images collapse varied events and locales in order to mark typological associations between past, present, and future, and between heaven and earth. I argue that the effect of this ambiguity was two-fold. On the one hand, the indeterminacy of the image expressed the otherworldliness of the afterlife by expressing the chasm between the earthly and heavenly realms. On the other hand, this ambiguity engaged the viewer in an effort toward resolution, that could in turn prompt reflection on their own potential paths both during and after their lives on earth.

Coptic liturgies, stelae, and texts note that after death, the blessed spend the intermediate state in the bosoms of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For example, a tenth- to eleventh-century Euchologion (a liturgical book containing the portions of the service delivered by the bishop, priest, and deacon) from the library of the White Monastery in Sohag (middle Egypt) containing verses written centuries earlier (Vatican Borgia Copte 109/110, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France Paris BN 12920, the British Library Or. 3580, and Cairo 92-60 r-v) describes the bosoms of the Patriarchs as the intermediate state in the commemorative sections of the anaphora (the part of the liturgy when the Eucharistic gifts are offered) of St. Cyril and St. Matthew, and possibly of St. Basil.85 The congregation asks the Lord to:

Give rest to their souls in the bosom of our fathers, saints Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Satisfy them in a place of greenery, by tranquil waters, in the paradise of delights, a place from which pain and sorrow and groaning have left, in the light of your saints.\(^{86}\)

That the congregation—its members alive—requests that the holy men be allowed to rest in the arms of the Patriarchs confirms that this passage describes the intermediate state, not the end of days, when no beings will remain living. Of particular relevance to understanding the reception of the image of the Patriarchs at the Monastery of St. Antony, the White Monastery Euchologion describes the Patriarchs’ bosoms as rich with greenery, close to a calm source of water,\(^{87}\) and full of spiritual joy and opulent comfort.\(^{88}\) In analogous fashion, the image in St Antony portrays the blessed in a lush green garden, so abundant that the background is a tangle of branches. The satisfied smiles of the figures and the plump fruits they pluck evoke sensorial pleasures and satisfaction. Although the Bible does not name the rich man, in the Coptic tradition he is known as Nineve. In the wall painting at the Monastery of St Antony, the wretched soul engulfed in flames is labeled as Nineve. The contrast between this tortured figure and the luxuriating blessed emphasizes the serene and abundant nature of the garden as opposed to the roaring fire that surrounds the damned.

Grave markers, too, indicate that the bosoms of the Patriarchs were understood as the locale of the intermediate state. In evoking the Patriarchs, a stele of Georgios, Bishop of Dongola

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\(^{86}\) \textit{κατασκοι ντί ντον ννεγγύς ἵν κούνφ ννενενετε ετούαα βαράδης ἵν θαακ ἵν ἵακωβ κανογίμου ἵν ουμα νυνότογετ ἵν ούμου ὅμο ἵν παράδος ντετρύφη πιμα ηταλ κας ἵν διάτ πιστ διάλ ἵν τλυπή ἵν παμαδό ἵν ηγαν νηκπετου διάβ.} Text from Lanne, “Le Grand Euchologe,” 264-65.

\(^{87}\) \textit{ɲmto}, (tranquil), means the state of being physically at rest (stasis), as well as relieved of illness. Thus, the tranquil water described here suggests both a state of serenity and of eternal wellbeing. It can also be understood as an eternal life-giving source. W. E. Crum, compiled, \textit{A Coptic Dictionary} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), \textit{s.v.}, “\textit{ɲmto}.”

\(^{88}\) \textit{ɲtetryf} (delights, pleasures, joys) is a variation of the Greek τρυφή, can mean both luxury and Edenic bliss in Patristic sources. Crum, \textit{A Coptic Dictionary}, \textit{s.v.}, “\textit{ɲtetryf}.”
(in Nubia, modern-day Sudan) dating to 1113 follows a well-known and common formula, one that stretches back to late antiquity.\textsuperscript{89}

Rest the soul of Your servant abba Georgios, archbishop, Archimandrite of [the Monastery of] Great Anthony (?) in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in a shining place, in a place of refreshment, from which pain and grief and lamentation have fled away.\textsuperscript{90}

The fact that Georgios should rest in the bosom of the Patriarchs following his death suggests that this was thought to be an intermediate locale. The text describes this place as bright (both spiritually and physically) and full of “refreshment.”\textsuperscript{91} Again, the description mirrors the painting in the Monastery of St. Antony. In the wall painting, the fruits are a vivid red and the branches accented with strokes of white, suggesting their luminosity. The golden and red garments signal radiance as well, because these colors represented light and—according to medieval color

\textsuperscript{89} As noted in the introduction, during the period that this dissertation covers (ninth to thirteenth centuries) the Nubian Church was under the ecclesiastical governance of the Coptic Church. Administratively, they formed a single Miaphysite Church under the leadership of the Coptic Patriarch. Due to the ecclesiastical link and close similarities in the material culture of death and burial, I treat Egyptian and Nubian material produced and used by members of this Miaphysite church together. See the introduction to this dissertation for further discussion of this point.


theory—were thought to be on the bright end of the color spectrum. The relaxed, pleasant environment suggests alleviation from the burdens of life on earth.

While commemorative inscriptions invoking the Patriarchs’ bosoms as the locale of the intermediate state were most popular in Egypt and Nubia, Latin and Greek examples are attested throughout the Christian world from Western Europe to the Red Sea. For example, the stele of a certain Chryside in the catacomb St. John in Syracuse, Sicily reads:

Remember, Lord, your servant Chrysides, and give her a luminescent place, the place of refreshment in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. [Chryside] of happy memory fell asleep before the nones of May.

This passage states that the bosoms of the Patriarchs served as the locale of the intermediate state. This place is “bright” and “refreshing,” as we have seen in Coptic examples. This suggests that the Coptic conception of the intermediate state as depicted in the image of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony, in which the righteous deceased spend the intermediate state in the bosoms of the Patriarchs, was consistent with beliefs attested in epigraphy and texts throughout the larger Christian oikoumene.

Liturgies observed by diverse Christian sects also suggest that the bosoms of the Patriarchs were understood as the locale of the intermediate state. A Byzantine prayer for the bereaved says to “[grant] your servant, who has fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection, repose in the bosom of Abraham.” Vasileios Marinis notes that in this prayer, “paradise is described as

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94 Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium*, 86.
the bosom of Abraham, a place of rest and refreshment, where the soul, which has fallen asleep but not died, awaits the resurrection.”

Thus this paradise refers primarily to the intermediate state between death and the resurrection.

The Orthodox Patriarch Germanos I (d. 733) interpreted the bosoms of the Patriarchs similarly in his liturgical commentary. Discussing the anaphora (the portion of the liturgy including the Eucharist), he notes that after death, “the souls of Christians are called with the prophets and apostles and hierarchs to gather and recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the mystical table of Christ the king.”

Prayers for the departed noting that the blessed will spend the intermediate period in the bosoms of the Patriarchs are found in the Syriac Liturgy of St. James as well.

A large number of wall paintings identified as Last Judgment scenes throughout Byzantium and the Latin West include images of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs. Marcello Angheben argues that these images depict the intermediate state, in contrast to the other imagery in Last Judgment scenes, which depict the apocalypse and its aftermath. Focusing on the Evangeliary of Stoudios, an eleventh-century Constantinopolitan manuscript (Paris Bibliothèque Nationale de France Ms. Gr. 74) (Figure 5), Angheben shows that the lowest register, in which the image of the Patriarch is located, depicts a moment of preliminary

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95 Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium*, 86.
97 van Loon, “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” 71.
judgment, which transpires immediately after death to determine where the deceased will spend the intermediate state, while the top registers depict the final sorting at the Last Judgment and its aftermath. He shows that other Byzantine Last Judgment scenes—including the mosaics of S. Maria Assunta in Torcello (Italy), thought to be executed by Byzantine artists in the eleventh century (Figure 6); a twelfth-century Italo-Byzantine ivory (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum) (Figure 7); and a wall painting dated to 1212 in Karşi Kilise in Cappadocia (Figure 8)—also distinguish depictions of preliminary judgment and the intermediate state from those of the End of Days, and include images of the Abraham or all three Patriarchs in the intermediate zone. Several thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian examples continue to depict the Patriarchs within the zone representing the intermediate state, separate from imagery of the Apocalypse.99

When the situation of images of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs is considered in relation to Byzantine architecture and ritual, they further affirm the argument that these images refer primarily to the intermediate state. Natalia Teteriatnikov has demonstrated that images of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs tended to be depicted in locations that were used in funerary ritual. For example, the Church of the Taxiarchs in Kastoria (Greece) preserves a tenth-century image of the bosom of the Patriarchs in the narthex, the space where corpses lay during burial ceremonies. Indeed, the image is situated directly above an area of pavement in order to mark the placement of the funerary bier during burial ceremonies. An image of the Patriarchs in the twelfth-century church of Panagia Arakos at Asinou (Greece) also locates an image of the Patriarchs in the narthex. Finally, an Iconoclast-era depiction of the Patriarchs (in which the figures are replaced by crosses, but are labeled by name) was located near burials in

the chapel of St. Basil in Cappadocia, in an apse where visitors prayed for the deceased (Figure 9).  

In summary, Christians throughout the medieval world associated the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs with the intermediate state between death and the Resurrection, and thus would have primarily interpreted the wall painting in the Monastery of St. Antony as a depiction of the intermediate state. Moreover, the location of these images in Byzantine contexts specifically pointed to this association with repose prior to the Last Judgment. That the artists, designers, and/or patrons responsible for the wall painting in the Monastery of St. Antony intended to depict the intermediate state is implied by its relationship to the larger program painted by Theodore in 1232-1233 and its location in the church. The image was located in the *khurus*, a room between the sanctuary and nave that signified the intermediate state in the Coptic tradition.

As Gertrude van Loon has shown, medieval Coptic Christians believed that different parts of the church were symbolic and chose painted decorations to match these meanings. Using two key theological treatises, the early thirteenth-century *Book of the Order of Priesthood* by an unknown author and the fourteenth-century *Book of the Precious Pearl of Ecclesiastical Sciences* by Yuhanna Ibn Zacharia Ibn Saba’, as well as church consecration rites, van Loon has shown that the medieval Coptic church as a whole was perceived as an earthly version of

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celestial heaven.\textsuperscript{102} Furthermore, the haykal, or sanctuary (Figure 10, Part IV), symbolized Heavenly Jerusalem, that is the place revealed at the time of the Last Judgment, while the khurus (Figure 10, Part III) signified the paradise of the intermediate state.\textsuperscript{103} In this sense, we might understand the space of the Coptic church to emphasize the intermediate state in ways that were stronger than church spaces of other traditions.

The symbolic significances of these ecclesiastical spaces were articulated ritually. For example, the clergy congregated in the khurus, in intermediate space associated with the paradise of the blessed, prior to entering the haykal, the sanctuary associated with the Heavenly Jerusalem. Van Loon stresses, however, that these meanings were not fixed. The distinction between the khurus and the naos was often blurred, and the naos could symbolize paradise as well.\textsuperscript{104} Furthermore, as I discuss below, a wide range of typological readings was an essential aspect of the interpretation of churches throughout the late antique and medieval worlds. Ecclesiastical architecture also symbolized Old and New Testament prefigurations (typological associations) of intermediate state and heavenly paradise.

The painted programs that decorated church spaces often echo and amplify sacred architecture’s symbolic meanings. Images in the haykal depict celestial Jerusalem as envisioned in the Revelation of St. John (Revelation 4:1 and 22:5), or allude to the Eucharist, which, when


\textsuperscript{103} The Arabic term haykal (هیكل) is derived from the Hebrew or Aramaic חֵקֶל, which refers to a “palace,” “temple,” or the “house of God.” Van Loon, \textit{The Gate of Heaven}, 116. The Arabic khurus (خورس) derives from the Coptic χωρος.

\textsuperscript{104} Van Loon, \textit{The Gate of Heaven}, 111.
performed properly, was thought to transform the *haykal* into Heavenly Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{105} The *haykal* of St. Benjamin in the Church of St. Makarius in the Monastery of St. Makarius in Wadi El-Natrun (lower Egypt) features paintings of the Twenty-Four Elders of the Apocalypse on the eastern, northern, and southern walls (Figure 11).\textsuperscript{106} A cherub and the four Beasts of the Apocalypse decorate the soffit of the octagonal drum (Figure 12). The Twenty-Four Elders of the Apocalypse also adorn the *haykal* of the al-Mu'allaqā Church in Cairo (Figure 13) and the Church of Abba Hadra in the Monastery of St. Simeon in Aswan (upper Egypt) (Figure 14).\textsuperscript{107}

Paintings in the *khurus* often allude to the intermediate state, the realm of the blessed, by referencing salvation. The early tenth-century program of the Church of the Holy Virgin in the Monastery of the Syrians in Wadi El-Natrun features images relating to salvation through baptism and conversion.\textsuperscript{108} The location of the image of the Patriarchs in the *khurus* of the Monastery of St. Antony provides additional evidence that this iconography was meant to depict the intermediate state. This is further suggested at the Church of St. Antony by the inclusion in the *haykal* of depictions of heavenly Jerusalem as described in the Revelation of St. John (Revelation 21): in the dome, Christ Pantocrator surrounded by the four incorporeal beings of the Apocalypse and four angels; on the drum, the Twenty-four Elders; and in the apse, an enthroned Christ in Majesty inscribed with the words, “Behold, heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool” (Isaiah 66:1) and surrounded by the four incorporeal beings, with a sun and moon on

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\textsuperscript{106} On this program, see Gabra Gawdat, *Coptic Monasteries: Egypt’s Monastic Art and Architecture* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 56-63.


either side. The depiction of the Pantocrator forms an important contrast to that of the Patriarchs; the visual similarity of their thrones and footstools—images of authority, including the authority to pass judgment—makes the images act like book ends, marking the transition from death to the ultimate day of Judgement before Christ. Just as the righteous awaited the Resurrection and Heavenly Jerusalem after death, medieval Coptic devotees saw the image of the blessed in the arms of the patriarchs while gathered in the khurus, lingering outside the haykal, which was transformed into Heavenly Jerusalem during the Eucharistic celebration.

Transgressing Time and Space

While liturgies, tombstones, and the location of the image of the blessed and the Patriarchs in both Miaphysite and Dyophysite Churches suggest that it would have been interpreted as depicting the intermediate state, the program mobilized deliberate temporal and cosmological ambiguity. In addition to direct depictions of celestial Jerusalem and the intermediate state, churches also depicted Old and New Testament prefigurations (τύπος, “type”) of these states. The association of sacred architecture with cross-temporal, as well as cross-cosmological (i.e., taking place in various parts of the cosmos) elements was essential to how medieval Coptic Christians experienced churches. I argue that these same structures of thinking shaped the image of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony.

The *haykal* could prefigure Heavenly Jerusalem through images of the Tabernacle and the Temple built by Solomon in the earthly Jerusalem. The Tabernacle was the portable sanctuary where the Israelites worshiped as they wandered through the desert for forty years after fleeing Egypt. The Temple of Solomon was the place of worship of the Israelites in Jerusalem during and following that monarch’s reign, as described in Kings. The Heavenly Jerusalem of the post-Apocalyptic period, as represented in Jacob’s dream (Genesis 28:10-12), Isaiah (54), Ezekiel (40-48), and Revelation (4:1 and 22:5), recalls these earthly realms. Programs in this area of the church include sacrificial imagery. These images recall the rites of the Tabernacle and Temple periods, when the Israelites of the Old Testament performed grain and animal sacrifices as symbols of God’s mercy. These images also evoke Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and the Eucharistic ritual, linking the present actors in the church to the past and future.

Thus the *haykal* in the Monastery of St. Antony includes images of Abraham meeting Melchizedek, Isaiah and the burning coal, and the sacrifices of Isaac and Jephtha’s daughter (Figures 15 and 16), all Old Testament prefigurations of Christ’s death and the Eucharist. The *khurus* signifies and thus includes images of biblical prefigurations of the intermediate state, which are salvific scenes. For this reason, the image of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony is positioned across from an image of the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace, depicted alongside the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, the king who banished them to the flames in the biblical story (Daniel 3) (Figure 17a). Coptic sources note that the Three Hebrews’ blissful state

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in the fire, transformed to gentle dew, prefigured the intermediate state because the fresh dewy breeze evoked paradise.\textsuperscript{116}

Together these images blur temporal and cosmological boundaries, placing viewers in both the past and future, both on earth and in the otherworldly zone of the intermediate state. The scale of the Patriarchs on the west wall parallels that of the Three Hebrews and their angelic savior to the east. Yet the image of the Three Hebrews is part of the same narrative scene as the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s palace, which is significantly smaller in scale than the Three Hebrews and Patriarchs (Figure 17b).\textsuperscript{117} This creates visual confusion and transcends spatial conventions of Coptic art, in which scenes in different frames are usually unrelated, even if the figures mildly transgress the borders of their images. The variances in the sizes of the figures serves several purposes: to highlight the holiness of the Patriarchs and the Hebrews in contrast to the souls of the righteous and the people in Nebuchadnezzar’s palace; to show these holy figures as typologically related to each other; and to create a transcendent experience for viewers by confounding their expectations for the normal representation of space and time.

A ninth-century image of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of the Syrians portrays similar ambiguity (Figure 18). The image is located in the naos, which van Loon has shown could hold similar meaning to the \textit{khurus} in symbolizing the intermediate state.\textsuperscript{118} A recently uncovered inscription in this section of the naos specifies that this portion of the decorative program was a commemorative dedication of around 889 to the recently deceased Abbot Maqari. The location of the image thus reinforces its interpretation as the intermediate state and recalls the Byzantine convention of placing of images appropriate to the given function.

\textsuperscript{116} Van Loon, \textit{The Gate of Heaven}, 175.
\textsuperscript{117} Bolman, “Theodore, ‘The Writer of Life’ and the Program of 1232/3,” 60.
\textsuperscript{118} Van Loon, \textit{The Gate of Heaven}, 111.
of that area within the church, especially placing imagery with funerary connotations near the location of burial biers.\textsuperscript{119}

Yet the of the image of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of the Syrians is ambiguous in its relationship to time. While the entire program has yet to be uncovered, the image neighbors an illustration of an event from the \textit{vita} of St. Makarius the Egyptian in which a cherub appears to the saint during mass (\textbf{Figure 19}).\textsuperscript{120} Although a window (now covered) originally separated the two paintings, the images are compositionally linked by the presence of identical small red fruits in the backgrounds. These same kinds of fruits are held by both the saved souls in the intermediate state and the monks accompanying St. Makarius (a scene not included in the \textit{vita}). The shared background suggests a conflation of these separate scenes into a single narrative moment. The scene from the life of St. Makarius must take place on earth and in the past (the saint died in 392). The intermediate state, of course, takes place in an otherworldly paradise, in the past, present, and future. The cherub flanking St. Makarius departs from the description in the \textit{vita} by the addition of three heads, which imitate the cherubim described in the vision of Ezekiel (1:10).\textsuperscript{121} This adaptation suggests an apocalyptic association, implying that the images of St. Makarius and of the Patriarchs take place in the past and future.

Written sources, such as liturgies, liturgical commentaries, and tombstones, echo this abstruse conception of time. From these sources it is possible to deduce that temporal elision was firmly linked to notions of the afterlife. The importance of typological interpretations of ecclesiastical space suggests that while the image of the Patriarchs would likely have been interpreted as a depiction of the intermediate state, a degree of ambiguity in these visual

\textsuperscript{120} The most recent publication on the program is Innemée, “Dayr al-Suryan: New Discoveries.”
representations facilitates the coming together of past, present, and future, which is an essential aspect of the intended message of the decorative program of the church as a whole.

The use of typological interpretations evokes liturgical time, the idea that, during Christian ritual, time collapses and the spaces associated with discrete events are drawn together. While liturgical time has not been studied in direct relation to the Coptic rite, scholars have examined this phenomenon in the medieval Western Christian and Byzantine traditions. The Catholic theologian Anscar J. Chupungco notes that because Christ entered earthly time and space, “in Christianity time and space are the stage where God and humankind meet each other.” The liturgy is a realm in which God and humanity once again cross paths. This is accomplished by the Eucharistic epiclesis (the invocation of the Holy Spirit on the gifts), the human participation in the divine mysteries, and the reenactment of events from the life and death of Christ. Each of these sacraments necessitates the joining of distinct temporal and spatial realms. The Byzantine liturgy refers to salvific actions of the past and future as taking place in the present. Byzantine liturgical commentaries note that the actions and objects of the liturgy both symbolize and actually transform into episodes from the Old and New Testaments and Apocalypse. The church thus becomes a place, as Peter Brown states, “where it was possible to share for a moment in the eternal repose of the saints in paradise.” Study of the typological meanings of the Coptic rite could provide additional evidence for the typological conceptions that the decorative programs of medieval Coptic churches communicate.

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This temporal ambiguity, the collapsing of time and space related to the afterlife, is also apparent in the inscription on the stele of Georgios, Bishop of Dongola, discussed above. The inscription articulates an eliding of the intermediate state with life on earth and the Heavenly Jerusalem of the post-Apocalyptic period. The epitaph concludes with an additional prayer stating, “And You, Christ, would give rest to [Georgios] in the land of living, and introduce him into the paradise of joy, into [the Church of] the first-born (which is in) Heavenly Jerusalem, with all Your saints, amen.”

The text requests that, during the intermediate state, Georgios relaxes in three locales—“the land of the living,” paradise (as depicted in images of the Patriarchs), and Heavenly Jerusalem (the realm of God’s saints). Time and space are therefore collapsed. The phrase “land of the living” further emphasizes the merging of different zones of time into one. The phrase often refers to the intermediate state, but its terminology also suggests physical, rather than spiritual, life. In contemporary secular conceptions of space and time, Georgios would not exist at once in various zones of the cosmos and in both pre- and post-Apocalyptic times. When a righteous individual died, however, they entered the paradise of the intermediate state. This state of in-betweenness, this indefinable state, was articulated in part through simultaneous reference to his or her life on earth and in the Heavenly Jerusalem of the End of Days, precisely because that life had ended but the Apocalyptic period had not yet begun.

126 ἀναπαύσεις σε, Χ(ριστ)έ, ἐν χώρᾳ ζώντων· (καὶ) εἰσήγαγεν σε εἰς τὸν παράδεισον τῆς τρυφῆς· τοῦ προτοτόκων Ἰε(πουσα)λήμ ἐπου(ρά)νιον μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων σου, (ἀμήν). Text and translation from Jakobielski and Łajtar, “Greek Funerary Inscriptions from Old Dongola,” 120-121.

127 Łaktar, “Georgios, Archbishop of Dongola,” 183-84, notes that references to “the land of the living,” “the paradise of joy,” and a place “with [God’s] saints,” are typical for Nubian tombstones with Greek epitaphs, whereas reference to Heavenly Jerusalem is taken from the Coptic liturgy and mostly seen in stelae with Coptic epitaphs from Egypt and Nubia. Łajtar interprets the epitaph to cite four requests, for rest in the “land of the living,” in paradise, in Heavenly Jerusalem, and in the place of the saints of God. This is important for the study of the terms used, but regarding the meaning of the epitaph, I note that in this inscription, Heavenly Jerusalem and the place of the saints of God are one and the same, meaning that there are three zones rather than four. This is clear by the use of μετὰ (in the midst of, among, along with) between the two phrases.
Needless to say, this ambiguous conception of the afterlife, with elision of time and space, was not unique to Coptic thought. Byzantine and Western Christian thinkers had similar conceptions of space and time as related to the afterlife, and interpreted images of the Patriarchs in similarly mystifying ways. Jane Baun notes that the middle Byzantine *Apocalypse of Anastasia* and *Apocalypse of the Theotokos* frame time and space “cyclically,” in the manner of liturgical time. The experience of viewing particular narrative and iconic images in churches was similarly cyclical.\(^{128}\) Baun notes that verbal tenses and descriptions employed in the texts can confuse readers because they result from “an attempt to experience time as does God, in whose mind past, present and future are all simultaneously present.”\(^{129}\) Space is described “iconically,” in order to encourage viewers to meditate on events of the story.\(^{130}\) Nancy Ševčenko interprets Byzantine Last Judgment scenes, which included images of the Patriarchs in paradise, in similar ways.\(^{131}\) She notes that Last Judgment scenes deliberately defy Byzantine conventions of spatial and temporal coherence. It is clear that several distinct events take place in the scenes, but viewers cannot readily interpret the sequence. This hazy depiction of time and confounding of earthly expectations communicates the transcendence of the afterlife.

Western European images also collapse time and space in the afterlife. Jérôme Baschet argues for what he calls “une coexistence—et même…une affirmation simultanée” of provisional and final judgments in Last Judgment scenes and other images of the afterlife beginning in the thirteenth century.\(^{132}\) This indicates both a typological relationship between the two judgments, and a collapsing into one of the Heavenly Jerusalem of the Apocalypse and the

\(^{128}\) Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 133.

\(^{129}\) Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 145.

\(^{130}\) Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 154.

\(^{131}\) Ševčenko, “Some Images of the Second Coming,” 254.

intermediate state (which was, by this point in the west, understood as “purgatory”). For example, a Breviary from Rouen (Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, W.300) of 1412 (Figure 20) includes a single tableau that depicts both the intermediate state and the End of Days. The fifteenth-century Dunois Hours (British Library Yates Thompson MS 3) (Figure 21) suggests a close relationship between purgatory, Heavenly Jerusalem, and current devotion on earth by depicting the donor, with an image of the very same Book of Hours, presented to Christ by St. John the Evangelist while Christ presides over the Last Judgment, liberating purgatory.

Conclusion

The image of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony, while uniquely Coptic in its placement in the church and relationship to other images, fits with conceptions of the afterlife that were present throughout the medieval Christian world. Coptic, Byzantine, and Western European Christians believed that deceased people spent the intermediate state between death and the Resurrection in either a paradisical garden or a fiery inferno, as described in the story of Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke. Each of these Christian sects, however, formulated conceptions of time and the geography of the cosmos that were not linear and straightforward. The three realms of the cosmos—earth, the intermediate state, and Heavenly Jerusalem—bled into one another, transgressing comprehensible spatial boundaries. Likewise, the biblical past, the present, and apocalyptic future, collapsed together, existing both consecutively and contemporaneously. Medieval Christians did not claim to understand this murky conception of space and time. Instead, imagery in art and text emphasize the paradoxes, the uncertain implications of such a cosmological view. Indeed, in Coptic works, this ambiguity aims to sow confusion. The

imprecise depictions of space and time in art and text emphasize the lack of a dogmatic conception of the afterlife in the Coptic tradition. Such imagery also aims to accentuate the immense chasm between life on earth and in the heavens. Heavenly space and time, it suggests, is beyond the comprehension of the living.

These confounding descriptions of the afterlife, wherein past and present and earth and Heaven blend together, have deep resonance for the appearance and meaning burial objects. In a culture with a concept of the afterlife wherein the past is inherently tied to the present and the deceased in Paradise are bound to those still on earth, burial objects serve both the present and future, the dead and the living. The next chapter looks at the materiality of the afterlife. This is another element of the hereafter that Coptic sources intentionally present with muddled meanings in order to heighten the spirituality of the other realm. I show that medieval Coptic Christians held a highly paradoxical view of the materiality of the intermediate state between death and the Resurrection. I argue that Copts believed in a distinctive materiality of the intermediate state, which was thought to be characterized by immaterial senses. These beliefs about time and space in the hereafter greatly affected the appearances and meanings of the burial objects discussed in later chapters.
CHAPTER II

Experiencing Heaven and Hell: The Materiality of the Intermediate State in Medieval Christian and Islamic Traditions

As noted in the previous chapter, the image of the blessed in paradise on the bosoms of the three Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony, a part of a program dated to 1232-1233, is one of dozens of such images of the intermediate state between death and the Resurrection found throughout the medieval Christian world. In Chapter One, I argued that such imagery connects Coptic communities to the larger Christian world. I also proposed that this scene emphasizes the ambiguous and esoteric nature of the afterlife by communicating collective beliefs about the collapsing of time and space. In this chapter, I turn to features in such imagery that point to differences between Coptic conceptions of the afterlife and those of other Christian sects. I show that the image of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony, and other scenes depicting the afterlife, connects Coptic Christians to the larger Christian community, while variations in iconography and style tailor the decorative programmes to Coptic viewers’ local interpretations of, and anxieties about, the afterlife. Moreover, I show that viewers of different Christian sects may have interpreted similar imagery in different ways, based on the context of the images in sectarian space and viewers’ unique expectations and previously held beliefs.
Focusing on beliefs about the materialism of the intermediate state, I show that materialism was thought to be operational in heaven, paradise, and Hades but in various degrees and with different characteristics. While many Christian sects believed in a body-soul dichotomy, with physical bodies and quasi-immaterial souls, medieval Coptic Christian sources define a unique conception of the materiality of the intermediate state. They suggest an intermediate garden that is noncorporeal and yet has a parallel heavenly senses. Moreover, the Coptic sources diverge strongly from those of their Muslim neighbors in conceptions of the materialism of the intermediate state. While medieval Muslims believed in a hyper-corporeal intermediate state, with bodies remaining sentient, Coptic Christian did not adopt this concept. The Coptic iconography of salvation emphasizes the profound differences in these conceptions of materialism. In essence, Coptic sources evoking the afterlife display a choice not to translate in any way the concepts of their Muslim neighbors to their own system of belief.

Body and Soul in the Intermediate State

In the image of the three Patriarchs in St. Antony, the blessed are depicted as small, childlike figures and lack the distinction and individuality accorded to the portraits of the Patriarchs. The faces of these saved individuals are indistinguishable, and their clothing is identical except for a variation between two colors, gold and red. In contrast, the Patriarchs are much larger in scale, are labeled with their individual names, and show marked differentiation in dress. In their small scale and lack of individualization, the depictions of the blessed follow medieval Eastern Christian artistic conventions for representations of souls, although of course they are depicted in bodily form.
Coptic thought, like that of other Christian sects, proposed a dichotomy between body and soul. This position followed that of the New Testament and Patristic thinkers. Martyrdom stories, theological treatises, and images in church programmes and manuscripts show that Copts, along with Christians of other sects, believed the soul exited the body after death, spending the intermediate state bodiless and reuniting to the body only at the Resurrection.

Coptic Christians believed in an anthropological dualism, that body and soul were separate entities, equally important and entwined during the individual’s lifetime. This attitude is typified in the writings of the late antique Egyptian theologian Shenoute of Atripe (347-465), father of the White Monastery Federation (near Sohag in Upper Egypt) and a renowned and influential figure to this day. His treatise of 445, *I Am Amazed*, is preserved in ninth- to twelfth-century manuscripts from the White Monastery. Employing ideas strongly influenced by Cyril of Alexandria (378-444), Shenoute writes, “The body did not exist before the soul, nor did the soul exist before the body, but God fashioned it and the body together in the womb.”

He affirms the separate natures of body and soul and their inherent union in a living individual. This dualism was crucial after death, when, Shenoute writes, “it is only the body that dies.” While Shenoute argued passionately for bodily resurrection, he believed the intermediate state was characterized by the presence of the soul alone. He writes, “The person who dies lays his body upon the

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135 ηπσωμα ὁν ὠροπ ἀν ἐτεὑρχη, οὐκε ἐντεὑρχη ὠροπ ἀν ἡθη ἡπσωμα. ἄλλα ἁτοφ ἀγιος ἱνσωμα 


137 Much of Shenoute’s writings on body and soul are refutations of Origenist beliefs denying the resurrection of the body, assuming the primacy and preexistence of the soul over the body, and espousing the doctrine of *metempsychosis* (the transmigration of the soul to another body after death, i.e., reincarnation). On this point, see Caroline T. Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies: Discipline and Salvation in...*
place of rest for those who will prepare him for burial, and his soul goes to God.”

Thus Shenoute attests to a separation of body and soul between death and resurrection. In this conception, the body stays on earth, while the righteous soul, so deeply entwined with the body during life and after resurrection, ascends to paradise.

The principles of anthropological dualism and the separation of body and soul in the intermediate state remained common beliefs for centuries and persisted across sectarian lines. The thirteenth-century Coptic theologian al-Safi ibn al-Assal (c.1205-c.1265) notes that various churches—Miaphysite, Diaphysite and even Nestorian—believed in anthropological dualism, and used “the union of the soul of the human being with his body” as a metaphor for the relationship of humanity and divinity in Christ. This dualism is exhibited in the writings of Latin Christian theologians such as the Saxon canon regular Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096-1141) and the French abbot Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), who, as Caroline Walker Bynum notes, “treated the human being as an entity composed of body and soul.” Like medieval Copts, Latin theologians believed that body and soul separate after death. Peter Lombard, Bishop of Paris (1100-1160) notes that the body “becomes a cadaver when the soul departs.” Byzantine theologians held similar positions, as evidenced in the *Dioptra* (1095) by the monk Philip Monotropos (fl. ca. 1100). This work is a dialog between body and soul, and the final chapter is

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an account of the afterlife from death to resurrection.\textsuperscript{142} The soul is told to “depart the flesh” and experiences the intermediate state without the body.\textsuperscript{143}

We have seen that Coptic, Western, and Byzantine Christians believed the soul exited the body at death and that these two entities reunited only at the Resurrection. I propose that images of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony and other images of the intermediate state emphasize this position by depicting souls, rather than bodies, in the intermediate state. The following study of medieval Christian images from Western Europe across the Eastern Mediterranean suggests that there is no single convention for depicting souls. Conventional iconography depicting souls differed depending on the type of image in which they were found. Koimesis imagery (the Death of the Virgin, known as the Dormition in the Latin tradition), depictions of the separation of the body and soul at the moment of death, and images of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs portray the soul as a swaddled baby or a young child. These innocent figures are diminutive, genderless, and lack differentiation. Images of the Harrowing of Hell, on the other hand, could represent souls as unique, mature bodies.

Medieval Christians believed souls to be quasi-immaterial. The Bishop John of Thessalonica (fl. ca. seventh century) wrote that, “The Catholic Church recognizes [human souls] to be spiritual, but not altogether incorporeal or invisible…rather as having a fine body of an aery or fiery nature.”\textsuperscript{144} Yet medieval Christians had no single convention for depicting incorporeal beings. Certain divine figures, especially the Godhead and the Holy Spirit, were not directly depicted due to the Second Commandment. Even the most ardent iconophiles argued for

\textsuperscript{142} Marinis, \textit{Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium}, 38.
\textsuperscript{143} \textgreek{εξίθι τοῦ σαρκίου}. Marinis, \textit{Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium}, 150, n72.
depicting only Christ. John of Damascus (646-749) wrote, “I do not depict the invisible divinity, but I depict God made visible in the flesh.”

Symbolic motifs, such as doves, stood in for direct depictions of figures like God the Father or the Holy Spirit. Yet souls were depicted since at least the first half of the seventh century. Other types of beings were seen as incorporeal but manifest. Glenn Peers notes that the depiction of angels, which at least one theologian believed were made of the same air and fire as souls, was characterized by “the tension between manifest form and incomprehensible nature.” I propose that souls had to be portrayed similarly because they were equally semi-material. Thus, artists developed particular conventions for communicating the distinctive features of souls.

Images of the Koimesis depict souls as swaddled babies. In a typical Byzantine illustration, for example, a late twelfth-century wall painting from the Church of the Virgin Arakiotissa in Lagoudera, Cyprus (Figure 22), the body of the Theotokos lies on a skirted bier. Christ carries the Virgin’s soul, a baby wrapped in white swaddling cloth. Her soul is smaller than her human body, about a quarter of the size. The eyes of her soul are open, those of her body closed; she has already passed. While the costume of the Virgin, vivid purple and blue bordered in gold, points to her regal position as Mother of God, the swaddling cloth of the soul is white, indicating purity.

Egyptian Koimesis images also depict souls as swaddled babies. An early tenth-century Koimesis scene from the Monastery of the Syrians (Figure 23) in Wadi Natrun portrays an open-

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146 From Kartsonis, Anastasis, 72.
armed archangel Michael (instead of Christ) about to receive the Virgin’s soul. This is likely due to the relatively early date of the image, rather than a reflection of a uniquely Egyptian iconographic type. Indeed, later Coptic images, including a thirteenth-century painting in the same church (Figure 24), depict Christ holding a swaddled baby that represents the Virgin’s soul. As in the Byzantine Koimesis, Mary’s soul is about a quarter of the size of her body; it is genderless. A thirteenth-century icon including scenes from the lives of the Virgin and Christ from the Church of St. Mercurius in Cairo includes a similar depiction of Mary’s soul in a scene of the Koimesis (Figure 25).

Another category of images depicts the moment that the body and soul separate. In these images, the soul, usually a nude child, exits the body through the mouth. It is either dragged or gently received by angels. An image from the Byzantine Theodore Psalter of 1066 (London, British Library, MS 19352, fol. 137r) (Figure 26) shows a soul, depicted as a naked youth, erupting out of its body. Its arms gesture towards an angel flying above. As in Koimesis images, the soul is a fraction of the size of the body. Its features lack identifying details or precision. The image illustrates a verse from Psalm 102 (103): “Because a breath passed through it, and it will be gone, and it will no longer recognize its place.” Marinis notes that the pairing of text and illustration suggests the death of “someone who has no fear of what comes next.”

150 ὅτι πνεῦμα διῆλθεν ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ οὐχ ὑπάρξει καὶ οὐκ ἐπιγνώσεται ἐτι τὸν τόπον αὐτοῦ. Marinis, Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium, 51.
151 Marinis, Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium, 51.
juxtaposition also illustrates the quasi-immateriality of the soul, which is like breath. Though the soul in the miniature is patently visible, the analogy to breath suggests its incorporeal nature.

Souls depicted in the bosoms of the Patriarchs have their own convention. Whether from Egypt, Byzantium, the Levant, or Western Europe, the souls are always a fraction of the size of the Patriarchs and are typically genderless and undifferentiated from each other. They resemble children in their diminutive size and innocent faces. Anghleban uses these criteria to identify souls versus resurrected bodies (which have been reunited with their souls) in medieval Byzantine and Italian Last Judgment scenes. We see this convention in a wall painting of c. 1263 of the Patriarchs in the Church of San Pellegrino in Bominaco (Italy) (Figure 27) and an eleventh-century ivory depicting the Last Judgment and said to be from Constantinople (now in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London) (see Figure 7).

While these are the most prevalent criteria for depicting souls in images of the Patriarchs, I note that some examples use additional conventions to communicate the unique nature of souls. The image of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of the Syrians (see Figure 18) illustrates naked souls in order to emphasize their genderless, prepubescent, and undifferentiated state. The naked, sexless figures also suggest the Edenic state of paradise. An eleventh-century image of Adam and Eve from Tutun (also known as Tebtunis) in the Fayum (now in the Coptic Museum, Cairo) (Figure 28) uses a similar convention. Prior to the Fall, the first man and woman, though gendered in their hairstyles and facial characteristics, lack markers of sexual difference. After, the Expulsion, the pair is depicted with primary and secondary sexual characteristics. Returning to images of souls, an image of the Patriarchs in a Last Judgment scene of 1192-1193 in the church of the Monastery of Saint Moses (Mar Musa) the Ethiopian in

western Syria depicts only the heads of the blessed. Their bodies are obscured by the Patriarchs’ garments. This strategy may have been intended to emphasize the quasi-immaterial nature of their souls (Figure 29). Like souls depicted in other images of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs, the faces of the Mar Musa examples are genderless and undifferentiated.

Images of the Anastasis (known in the West as the Harrowing of Hell), use different archetypes to depict souls in the intermediate state. In some cases, such as a tenth- to eleventh-century wall painting from the lower church in Banganarti near Dongola (Nubia) (Figure 30 a and b) the inhabitants of Hades appear similar to souls in scenes of the Koimesis, of the separation of body and soul, and of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs. In this image, Christ, in a flowing white robe, is large and clothed. The souls of the deceased, on the other hand, are a fraction of his size, naked, and genderless. They tumble in the vast darkness of Hades, from which Christ grabs them. In other cases, only select souls are portrayed using this convention. The Harrowing of Hell depicted in the Last Judgment mosaic in Torcello (near Venice in Italy) (Figure 31 a) depicts souls both as indistinguishable, genderless children and as adults, differentiated by gender and rank. Scale seems to be a strong indicator of status: the image includes figures of various sizes, a hierarchy from the colossal Christ and archangels to John the Baptist, Adam and Eve to the even smaller David and Solomon, to the miniature figures behind the Baptist to the diminutive anonymous dead, who are below the other figures, enclosed in a dark background.153 These figures resemble the souls that sit in the bosoms of Abraham several registers below (Figure 31 b) and which we have seen in other images of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs. It seems that the size and personal detail afforded to individual souls may relate to status, with the most eminent biblical characters differentiated from ordinary

153 Kartsonis, Anastasis, 160.
figures, as we see in images of the Patriarchs. It is also possible that the size and detail of the images is a narrative device, indicating that while the anonymous dead had not yet been raised from Hades, Christ had already liberated the figures above.

Yet other images of the Anastasis depict all the deceased souls in Hades as full-sized, distinctly rendered adults. It is possible that the artists aimed to convey that these souls, like those of the biblical figures in the Torcello image, had already been raised from Hades. Alternately, this could simply be an idiosyncratic feature of specific images. The Byzantine ivory box of the tenth to twelfth century known as the Stuttgart casket, (Figure 32) depicts the anonymous dead as adults in the same scale as Adam and Christ. These figures rise out of sarcophagi. The iconography does not suggest actual bodies emerging from graves, but instead is symbolic of souls departing the darkness of Hades. The fact that they are on the same plane as Christ suggests that they may already be liberated from Hades. A wooden panel depicting the Anastasis from a sanctuary screen of the al-Mu’allqa church in Cairo (c. 1300) (Figure 33 a) depicts elaborately carved souls—including Adam, Eve, David, and the Prophets and the just men of the Old Testament—in differentiated dress. The figures are gendered and have unique facial features and expressions. They are around the same size as Christ. Significantly, the souls are rendered in the same style, scale, and detail as bodies in the other panels of the screen (Figures 33 b-f). These images, of the Nativity, Baptism, Entry into Jerusalem, Ascension, and Pentecost, all depict bodies on earth (see Figure 33 g-j for non-figural panels of the screen, and

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154 On this casket, see Klaus Wessel, “Das byzantinische Elfenbeinkastchen in Stuttgart,” Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg, 11 (1974): 7-20; Kartsonis, Anastasis, 159; John Hanson, “The Stuttgart Casket and the Permeability of the Byzantine Artistic Tradition,” Gesta 37.1 (1998): 13-25. While Kartsonis identifies all these figures as the anonymous dead, Wessel notes that some of them may have had identifying features that have eroded.

Figure 33 k for schematic reconstruction of the doors). Perhaps the artist intended to convey that the souls have already been liberated from Hades, or perhaps such iconography was simply a conventional way to depict souls.

An image from a thirteenth-century Coptic icon (now in the Coptic Museum, Cairo) depicts souls in similar terms (Figures 34 a and b). The righteous dead are the same size as Christ and differentiated in gender, costume, hairstyle, and facial expression. These figures stand before a golden, mountainous background. Below them, a dark space strewn with coffins represents Hades. Perhaps their depiction, fully clothed, in differentiated form, aims to indicate that they have been raised from Hades.¹⁵⁶

In the medieval Christian iconography of salvation, souls could be depicted in various ways, depending on conventions for the type of image (e.g., Koimesis, Anastasis, etc.). In images of the Patriarchs in paradise, souls are always genderless, undifferentiated children that are a fraction of the size of the Patriarchs. These features indicate the equality of the intermediate state, that its inhabitants (save for eminent biblical figures) were undifferentiated in status, wealth, and sex. These attributes also indicate that we are seeing souls, rather than bodies.

The Materiality of the Intermediate Garden

The fact that we see souls, not bodies, in the image of the Three Patriarchs at St. Antony emphasizes the important fact that these souls have left their bodies and exist separately from them. The Coptic Koimesis images discussed above, which depict both body and soul, make clear the body-soul separation at the time of death, and they allude to the localization of the dead body on earth and the liberated soul in the heavens. In the thirteenth-century painting of the

¹⁵⁶ Kartsonis, Anastasis, 157-164 suggests that the iconography of the Harrowing of Hell can be related to that of the resurrection of the body at the Last Judgment.
Koimesis in the Monastery of the Syrians (see Figure 18), Christ stands in the same earthly space as the body of the Virgin and the Apostles. A flat green background articulates this space. A starry sky at the top of the apse portrays the heavens, a space into which emerge Christ and the angels that flank him. While he raises the Virgin’s soul toward this area, suggesting its ascent to the heavens, the Virgin’s body lies lifeless on her cloth-draped bier, firmly within the earthly realm. The soul advances towards the heavens, while the body and its swathed deathbed platform—the attributes of death and burial—remain in this world.

This arrangement places the body and the objects related to its burial in opposition to the soul. The physical body and objects related to death are on earth, the quasi-immaterial soul in heaven. Several images of the Anastasis include depictions of funerary objects, usually in the form of coffins. The composition of the images emphasizes the contrast between the objects and the intermediate realm of the blessed. In the Anastasis image in a thirteenth-century Coptic icon discussed above (see Figure 34 a and b), Christ and the blessed individuals he has saved stand before two jagged mountains and a gold background. The figures are positioned atop a black cavern in which three caskets float. As in Byzantine Anastasis images, the dark cavern represents Hades (the abode of the deceased prior to the arrival of Christ), and the coffins symbolize Hades as well.\textsuperscript{157} The coffins are painted with attention to decorative and material detail, for example, in the articulated gilded lines resembling carvings. This attention to physical detail is noteworthy because it emphasizes the material reality of this realm, which might be understood to be closer to the physicality of the earthly domain rather than the spirituality of heaven. The denizens of Hades are situated in a distinctly different realm than that occupied by the blessed in paradise, remaining in the place from which the blessed have been redeemed.

\textsuperscript{157} Kartsonis, \textit{Anastasis}, 207.
At the time of the Anastasis, Christ evacuated Hades, leading the worthy dead to heavenly paradise. Indeed, Kartsonis notes that paired mountains in Byzantine images suggest the rending of earth that occurred when Christ ascended to heaven. She notes that medieval maps depict the world as a mountain, as seen in images in ninth- and eleventh-century manuscripts of the sixth-century *Christian Topography* of the Alexandrian merchant-traveler Cosmas Indicopleustes (Figure 35).¹⁵⁸ Thus Kartsonis observes that Anastasis images with rent mountains “also offer evidence of the path followed by the Logos [Christ] when he rose as the sun of righteousness after despoiling Hades and freeing its prisoners by means of the cross.”¹⁵⁹ In other words, these Anastasis images show Christ and the blessed en route from Hades, through earth, to the heavens. That the physical objects of death and burial—in this image, coffins—stay in Hades rather than travel with the blessed to heaven emphasizes the objects’ absence from the intermediate paradise that is the domain of the incorporeal soul alone. The image—and its geography of the afterlife—emphasizes an opposition between the increasing immateriality of paradise and the persistent materiality and corporeality of Hades. In other words, I propose that artistic renderings of Hades and paradise clearly distinguish between the intermediary abodes of the pre- and post-messianic ages. Hades, the intermediary realm where the deceased went prior to the coming of Christ, was a place of body and soul, of the material and immaterial. In contrast, Christ’s resurrection opened up a new intermediate destination, the garden of paradise, which was the realm of the soul alone.

Despite the way in which the material trappings of earth are largely absent in depictions of paradise, Coptic sources almost always imagine an emphatically material and sensorial picture of the intermediate garden. This picture, however, often constructs an opposition between heavenly and earthly materialism. While the intermediate garden is believed to be a localized place, and a material one at that, many Coptic texts articulate material qualities that are of a different sort to those of earth, a spiritual materialism. Furthermore, the sources paint a picture of the blessed dead experiencing different sensations and pleasures than those on earth.

Father Gabriele Giamberardini shows that Coptic textual sources conceive of heaven as a localized place, not merely a state of being.\footnote{Giamberardini, “La Sorte dei Defunti nella Tradizione Copta (continuazione),” 154.} He notes that the \textit{Apocalypse of Paul} (an Egyptian text composed in Greek in the late fourth century, but preserved in Coptic in a manuscript of the tenth to eleventh century from the monasteries of Edfu and Esna in Upper Egypt) describes paradise in especially “material” terms, emphasizing the richness of the environment.\footnote{Giamberardini, “La Sorte dei Defunti nella Tradizione Copta (continuazione),” 154.} The author of the work describes “a ship of gold, with a prow of silver, and cordage and tackle of gold, and sails of silver; and the ship was inlaid with precious stones.”\footnote{ⲉⲩ ϫⲟⲓⲛⲟⲩⲃ ω ⫙ⲇⲣⲇⲉⲓⲥⲟⲥ ᩖⲣⲥ E.A. Wallis Budge, \textit{Miscellaneous Coptic texts in the dialect of Upper Egypt} (London: British Museum), 1051.} Paradise engages the senses: “All of paradise was [lighted with] caerulean blue light, and this light was like unto that of noonday wherein there is no greyness.”\footnote{ⲡⲡⲁⲣⲁⲇⲉⲓⲥⲟⲥ ϩⲥⲉⲥ ϩⲃⲧⲛⲁⲙⲁⲩ ␪ⲉⲃⲧⲁⲲⲣⲉ ϩⲃⲧⲁⲲⲣⲉ ␪ⲁⲩⲧⲉ ␪ⲁⲩⲧⲉ ␪ⲧⲁⲯⲩⲧⲉ. Budge, \textit{Miscellaneous Coptic Texts}, 1080.} The sweet songs of the trees reverberate throughout; the landscape emanates the fragrant scents of herbs and myrrh; and cinnamon and almonds grow abundantly.\footnote{Budge, \textit{Miscellaneous Coptic texts}, 570. Translation from Budge, \textit{Miscellaneous Coptic Texts}, 1080.}
Yet the materiality of paradise as described in the text appears to stand in opposition to that of earth. The righteous individuals in the garden “do not seek to obtain their freedom upon the earth, and since they suffer hunger, and are athirst, and endure violence for God's sake, for this reason God giveth unto them the good things that are in this city ten thousandfold.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, the blessed individuals who do not enjoy material pleasures on earth receive spiritual ones in the afterlife. The author of *Apocalypse of Paul* thus sets up a dichotomy between earthly and heavenly delights, suggesting that those described here, though described in material, sensorial terms, are actually spiritual in nature. This is standard in discussions of the paradise and heaven.

This conception of parallelism and difference between earthly and heavenly materialism is also evident in the image of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony. The image includes highly sensorial imagery, such as vibrant colors, ripe fruits, fragrant flora, and supple fabrics, indicating the pleasurable sensations of the afterlife. Yet viewers could not fully access these material pleasures. Scholars of Byzantine art have shown that the church and ritual context of images added to the meaning of ecclesiastical decorative programmes through the multisensory material experiences of liturgical ritual.¹⁶⁶ For example, the sweet scent of incense and reverberating sound of liturgical music coalesced with the gleam and iconography of mosaics to transport congregants—temporarily—to heaven on earth.¹⁶⁷ The placement and context of the image of the Patriarchs worked in similar ways. The image was located in the *khurus*, a waiting zone between the nave and *haykal*, and a space of the church where no liturgical rites took place.

The sensory aspects of the liturgy—the smell of incense, the sound of chants, the brightness of the hanging lights, the taste of the Eucharistic gifts, and the softness of the luxurious textiles of the altar—were all localized in the *haykal* (the area of the altar, which was understood metaphorically as representative of Celestial Jerusalem), just beyond the viewer’s access. The scents, sounds, and illuminations reverberated from the *haykal* to the *khurus*, but while the clergy in the *khurus* got a whiff of them, so to speak, they could not fully access them.

This is similar to the visual experience of standing before the image of the Patriarchs in the *khurus*, in which devotees could glimpse heavenly paradise behind the human wall of the three figures. In the *khurus*, the material and sensorial aspects of paradise seemed just beyond the viewer’s reach. During the liturgy, wafts of scent and beams of light emanated from the *haykal*, but devotees were denied direct access to the physical objects (the lamps, the censers) from which they came, making these sensations seem immaterial, unearthly. There is an uncertainty and ambiguity in this proximity to sensation, an ineffableness, that contributes to an ambiance of the sacred much as the conflation of time and place does in imagery. In this way, the relationship between the image of the blessed in the bosoms of the Patriarchs and its sensorial context in the *khurus* affirms the iconography, in which the Patriarchs sit between the viewer and the garden, impeding access to an otherworldly domain that the devout can imagine, but cannot truly comprehend.

Additional sources attest to a strain of Coptic thought that opposed the spiritual nature of heavenly materialism with the corporeal nature of earthly materialism. The *Vision of St. Makarius* recounts the story of the saint’s teacher, who came upon a dead, rotting animal flanked by angels.

My teacher saw a dead animal in front of him, and it stank very badly, so when he smelled the odor of the animal and its rotten flesh, he covered his nose with his cloak.
The angels did like him, and my teacher said to them, “do you also smell the stench of this world, like us?” They said to him, “No, but seeing you do this we did like you, so as not to judge you.” And he said, “Do you smell anything at all?” The angels said to him, “We do not smell anything of this world, but we smell the rot of the souls of sinners, as you have smelled the stench of the decay of the dead animal.”

This anecdote describes how angels do not experience earthly sensations, but instead feel parallel heavenly versions. They sense the spiritual realm, so they sense the putrid rot of evil and the sweet fragrance of good. The celestial senses are symbolic of righteousness, but they are also material, or at least expressed in physical and material terms. Some Coptic sources therefore imply that the heavens may have been sensorial, but in a way that differed from the sensorium of earth. Thus, the materialism of the image of the Patriarchs, indeed, in the description in the Apocalypse of Paul and the Koimesis images as well, may serve to both parallel and contrast earthly and heavenly materialism. This paradox—a simultaneous parallelism and incomparability—typifies the confounding nature of the medieval Coptic conception of the afterlife, as well as notions of the afterlife in other Christian sects. Because the medieval Coptic church did not have a codified doctrine on the afterlife, this ambiguity communicated the enigmatic, incongruous, and otherworldly aspects of the afterlife.

Because Byzantine Christianity did not define an official position on the afterlife, there emerged various perceptions of the materiality of the intermediate state. The most prevalent conception, as described above, was that the setting of the intermediate state was a paradisiacal

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garden associated with the earthly abode of Adam and Eve. This locale was thought to be a localized place that could be situated within the cosmos. Writers that follow this conception use emphatically sensorial language to describe this place. Their descriptions mirror depictions of the intermediate garden in images of the Patriarchs. For example, Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople (d. after 893) describes the flowers, sweet fragrance, and breezes of paradise. Similar lush elements are depicted in an image of Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham in a manuscript of the *Homilies of Gregory Nazianzus* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France gr. 510, folio 149), produced in Constantinople between 879 and 883, and probably commissioned by Photios for Basil I (Figure 36). Though the image is poorly preserved, it is possible to make out at least three varieties of trees, in variegated shades of green, one with vivid red flowers. Photios’s text aimed to distinguish the intermediate paradise from the post-Apocalyptic Heavenly Kingdom in ways that accord with ideas communicated visually in the manuscript image. That paradise is a material place, with real, physical trees and flowers, whereas Celestial Jerusalem is entirely spiritual, is a key distinction to Photios. His use of language that makes palpable the sensory and material elements of paradise clarifies his notion of the afterlife to readers. His vision resonates with that found in images of the Patriarchs in paradise.

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170 φυτῶν μὲν γάρ ἄνθη καὶ κάλλη καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ νάματα τὸ χωρίον περιρρέοντα καρπῶν τε ὁραίων ποικιλία καὶ βοτανῶν φύσεις ἡδύ τε καὶ ἐπίχαρι πνέουσαι καὶ διὰ πάντων τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς ἡγεμονίας καὶ των ἀρχαίων τε καὶ ὀρατών καὶ ἀρόματων καὶ διὰ τῶν αἰσθημάτων τῆς σωματικῆς ἀνθρώπου, καὶ ἀνεξάρτητα καὶ ἀναφράγματι καὶ τῆς ἀναφόρας ἀκτίνας ὑποδεχομένης τοῦ ἡλίου, πῶς οὐχὶ τὸ χωρίον ὅλον ἀποτελοῦσι τὴν πρώτην τοῦ ἀπόκειται τοῦ ἀνθρώπου; ηδονῆς τούτης ἀκολουθεῖ τοῦς ἀνθρώπους πάντων φέρειν τὸ ἀναφράγμα τοῦ ἀναφόρας τῆς ἀναφόρας ἀκτίνας ὑποδεχομένης τοῦ ἡλίου.

In contrast, some Byzantine authors believed the afterlife was an entirely spiritual state. These authors, however, continued to make use of material and sensorial language that mirrors the iconography of images of the Patriarchs. The use of this language is not literal. The authors make clear that their material and sensorial language is allegorical, giving readers a concept of what supernatural delights await them in the afterlife through means humans can understand. For example, Niketas Stethatos (1005-1090), in contrast to the majority of Byzantine thinkers, believed that deceased souls went directly to the Celestial Kingdom. After Christ’s resurrection, the Heavenly Kingdom opened, and the paradisiacal garden shut. While earthly paradise was lush with material pleasures, the Celestial Kingdom is characterized by immateriality. The souls of saints and the Trinity bask in “primordial light.” Yet the flora of paradise is not irrelevant in the post-Incarnation world. Paradise remains relevant in the visible world, wherein the Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge symbolize God and human nature, and in the intelligible world—the human mind—where paradisiacal plants stand for pleasure and pain. Niketas and his followers would not interpret the images of the trees in Photios’s manuscript literally. They would understand them instead as symbols of God and the heavenly realm and the human condition in the afterlife.

Dirk Krausmüller argues that the debate over the nature of the place of the deceased, along with the related conception of the materiality of that place, unfolded in highly intellectual and educated circles of Constantinople. While the writings of Photios of Constantinople and Niketas Stethatos are theological treatises, aimed at defining and clarifying doctrine, writings in

173 Marinis, Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium, 41.
174 πρωτον φος Marinis, Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium, 41.
175 Krausmüller, “What is Paradise and Who is in it?,” 51.
other genres are less precise about the afterlife. Many of these sources combine various types of paradisical materiality, forming a seemingly incomprehensible description. Yet the opacity of these descriptions serves to convey the complexity and ambiguity of the intermediate state. The Greek *Life of Basil the Younger* describes the bosom of Abraham as “full of various flowers, sweet-smelling violets and roses, and spices of various types…and every other pleasant fragrance.”

Yet, much like in the Coptic tradition, these sensations and objects cannot be experienced corporally, because bodily senses are irrelevant in paradise. Palaces for the Patriarchs and the sons of Jacob are “noetic…devised through the Holy Spirit immaterially and noetically, and constructed by God the Almighty, composed of rays in myriad forms of awesome splendors.” They cannot be experienced in earthly form. The protagonists of the *Life of Basil the Younger* exist in heaven “noetically and not with bodily senses.” The narrator attempts to touch his own body but is unable to feel. “For I did not perceive that I touched any of my limbs at all, because I was there in a noetic state and not in a waking dream.” This quotation emphasizes that there are no bodies or corporeal sensation in paradise.

The vita continually uses the same term, noetic (νοητός), to describe the material and physical senses of this state. In medieval Christian literature, noetic denotes “spiritual, belonging to the supra sensible and spiritual order.” It is the opposite of αἰσθητός (sensible, perceptible).

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177 νοητά….ἀΰλως καὶ νοερῶς Πνεύματι Ἀγίῳ τεχνουργισμένα καὶ κατεσκευασμένα ὑπὸ Θεοῦ Παντοκράτορος, μυριοπλασίους ἀκτίσι φρικτῶν διανεμημένα μεμουσουργημένα τε καὶ καθωράσιμα εἰς ἄκραν εὐπρέπειαν. Sullivan et. al., trans., *The Life of Saint Basil the Younger*, 257.
So then how are we to read the materiality of the vita’s afterlife? The use of this term juxtaposed with seemingly contradictory sensory descriptions of paradise has led Vasileios Marinis to suggest that the material and sensory details the *Life of Basil the Younger* describes are not intended to be present in the afterlife literally. Instead, he notes, “the author mines the experience of his audience to help them relate to an otherworldly account.”

Indeed, Jane Baun contends that the compilers of the middle Byzantine *Apocalypse of Anastasia* and *Apocalypse of the Theotokos* did not believe the accounts were “true pictures of the Other World in all their particulars.” The works were meant to be read allegorically rather than as manuals to the heavens. When read literally, the suprasensory sensations in the *Life of Basil the Younger* suggest that the materiality of the heavens is spiritual rather than corporeal; read allegorically, the paradox of noetic materiality emphasizes differences between earth and heaven, because the properties of heaven belie earthly logic.

Much like Byzantine authors, Western European theologians offer conflicting conceptions on the materiality of heaven. Materialist conceptions became standard toward the end of the twelfth century and were meticulously defined in the doctrine of Purgatory of 1245. However, prior to 1170, when Jacques Le Goff believes the formulation of the doctrine of Purgatory began, both literalist and spiritualist conceptions of the intermediate state existed. Claude Carozzi argues that twelfth-century Western Europe produced two diametrically opposed schools of thought on the subject. Like Carozzi, Le Goff and Carolyn Walker Bynum document both literalist and spiritualist positions in twelfth-century writings, but argue that the

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181 Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium*, 44.
182 Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 136.
contradictions “are not between writers but within writers.”¹⁸⁴ In other words, conceptions of the intermediate state and its material and spatial form were muddled in this period to such a degree that most authors express inconsistent arguments in their own work.

The writings of Honorius Augustodunensis (c. 1080-1154), who spent his career at the Scots Monastery in Regensburg, Germany, epitomizes this phenomenon. In his treatise, *Liber de cognition verae vitae*, Honorius makes clear that he believes the intermediate state takes place in a spiritual abode rather than a material place. He writes that the intermediate place of the blessed defined by:

not the walls of the cities, nor the possessions of estates, nor the abundance of gold and jewels, nor the abundance of furnishings, but justice and peace and all sorts of glory are held to be true there in full joy, because it is made of the vision of eternal light and the company of angels and saints.¹⁸⁵

However, as Le Goff states, “What [Honorius means] by ‘spiritual’ is ambiguous. It may designate a certain corporeal quality, or it may mean a reality that is purely symbolic, metaphorical. Honorius hesitated between the two.”¹⁸⁶ In his *Elucidarium*, Honorius suggests a more materialist conception of the afterlife. He writes that postmortem souls take “the form of the bodies they wore in this world.”¹⁸⁷ These figures suffer purgation “in the form of excessive heat or excessive cold or any other kind of trial, but the least of these trials is greater than the

¹⁸⁵ non urbium moenia, non possessionum praedia, non auri et gemmarum copia, non supellex varia, sed justitia et pax et omnimoda gloria in pleno gaudio creditur, quod de visione aeternae claritalis, et de societate Angelorum et sanctorum habetur. Cited in Carozzi, “Structure et fonction de la vision de Tnugdal,” 228.
¹⁸⁷ In forma corporum quam hic gesserunt. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 137.
greatest that one can imagine in this life.” Honorius here corporealizes the soul, envisioning it as having the ability to feel sensations acutely. Thus, Honorius describes incorporeal souls, but which have the ability to feel physical sensations.

Rather than try to decipher a single, coherent eschatology from Honorius, it is best to follow Bynum and Le Goff and focus the inconsistencies present in twelfth-century Western European eschatology. The ambiguity may be reflected in contemporaneous images of the Patriarchs. The example in the eleventh-century Last Judgment in Torcello (see Figure 31 b) includes realistically rendered palm trees and a flower-strewn ground, but the flat gold background, as is present elsewhere in the mosaic, is a characteristic that suggests the immateriality of heaven. Whether a consequence of doctrinal confusion or a deliberate depiction of the ambiguity of the materialism of the intermediate state, the juxtaposition of markers of the material world and immaterial heavens is a striking depiction of the conception of the intermediate state in the period prior to the invention of Purgatory.

On the easternmost frontiers of Christendom, the Church of the East (the so-called Nestorian Church, based in Baghdad from 775 to c. 1281) espoused the doctrine of soul sleep, the belief that deceased souls experienced no sensation or materialism whatsoever prior to the Resurrection. The Church canonized this belief in the synod 790. The idea is also found in late antique Syriac texts by authors such as Aphrardat (c. 280-c. 345), Ephrem (c. 306-373), and Narsai (c. 399-c. 502), though, by the medieval period, the Syriac Orthodox Christians (whom we know to have commissioned and viewed images of the Patriarchs at the Monastery of the

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188 Nimius calor ignus, aut magnus rigor frigoris, aut aliud quodlibet genus poenarum; de quibus tamen minimum majus est quam maximum quod in hac vita excogitari potest. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 137.
Syrians) seem to no longer have ascribed to this belief. Though dating to late antiquity, the writings of Ephrem merit discussion here, because paintings of the Patriarchs in paradise, including the one in the Monastery of St. Antony, parallel their imagery so closely that scholars have suggested that the paintings were directly inspired by the writings.\textsuperscript{190}

Ephrem wrote fifteen hymns on paradise, which, like the images of the Patriarchs, provide an intensely material image of this place, describing its scents, tastes, and sights. Paradise’s “gift” is “this treasure of perfumes,/this storehouse of scents.”\textsuperscript{191} Each tree contains “a banquet…with fruit of every savor/ ranged for the hand to pluck.”\textsuperscript{192} The beauty of paradise is evident in the landscape. “The months blossom with flowers/all around paradise/in order to weave/throughout every season/a wreath of blossom.”\textsuperscript{193} This imagery seems to suggest that paradise was a real, localized place, with vibrant sensations, as we have seen in Coptic and some Byzantine and Latin texts. Yet Sebastian Brock notes that because Ephrem was an adherent of the doctrine of soul sleep, these earthly descriptions “should not be taken literally.”\textsuperscript{194} Ephrem writes, “For him who would tell of it/there is no other means/but to use the names of things that are visible,/thus depicting for his hearers/a likeness of things that are hidden.”\textsuperscript{195} Paradise was not, according to Ephrem, a literal place.\textsuperscript{196} Instead, the use of terrestrial terms served to emphasize the distinction between the heavenly and earthly realms.\textsuperscript{197} To Ephrem, the use of sensorial and material language in descriptions of paradise is entirely metaphorical.

\textsuperscript{190} Karel Innemée, “Dayr al-Suryan: New Discoveries,” 19.
\textsuperscript{192} Ephrem The Syrian, \textit{Hymns on Paradise}, 137.
\textsuperscript{193} Ephrem The Syrian, \textit{Hymns on Paradise}, 148.
\textsuperscript{194} Ephrem The Syrian, \textit{Hymns on Paradise}, 54.
\textsuperscript{195} Ephrem The Syrian, \textit{Hymns on Paradise}, 155.
\textsuperscript{196} Ephrem The Syrian, \textit{Hymns on Paradise}, 51.
\textsuperscript{197} Ephrem The Syrian, \textit{Hymns on Paradise}, 54.
We have seen that various conceptions of the materiality of the intermediate state existed throughout the medieval Christian world. Yet the same type of images were present in locations associated with various sects and/or beliefs, with the same detailed imagery of lush gardens with blooming trees. I have been unable to find consistent, meaningful differences between images made and used by different medieval Christian sects. What are we to make of this? Images of the Patriarchs in paradise likely had different meanings to different viewers. In late antique Syria where Ephrem lived and wrote, the doctrine of soul sleep was prevalent. In this doctrinal-historical context, the vibrant and fragrant fruit-bearing trees present in both the writings and images would have been interpreted as metaphorical, a symbol of the sweet, restful sleep of the deceased. In medieval Egypt, in contrast, the same images would likely have been understood as depictions of a real, localized place, yet the material and sensorial delights pictured elicited spiritual, suprasensory pleasures that could not be fully comprehended by living humans. Similar forms, then, could hold different meanings for different viewers. In later chapters of this dissertation, I will show that this principle holds true for burial objects as well.

**Hell, Pain, and Bodily Decay: Christian and Islamic Traditions**

In contrast to the variation in conceptions of the materiality of the afterlife across the Christian world, Islamic sources, both Sunni and Shia, agree on the centrality of corporeality and materiality during the intermediate state. In Islam, the intermediate state is known at *al-barzakh* (البرزخ, barrier, partition), and it was thought to have emphatically physical and sensory qualities. The Qur’an described *al-barzakh* as a physical and temporal barrier between the living and dead, heaven and earth.¹⁹⁸ Beginning in the eighth century, however, *al-barzakh* became connected to

the physical location of the body after death, usually the grave.\textsuperscript{199} The deceased person also retained material qualities. Like many of the late antique and medieval Christian thinkers discussed above, medieval Muslim theologians believed in anthropological dualism. People were thought to be composites of body (jasad, جسد) and spirit (ruh, روح) or soul (نفس, نفس).\textsuperscript{200} Medieval writers often emphasize the material elements of deceased spirits.\textsuperscript{201} The philosopher Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (c. 1058-1111) in his \emph{al-Durra al-Fakhira} (\textit{Book of the Precious Pearl}) describes the spirit as being the size of a bee and having human attributes.\textsuperscript{202} It behaves like liquid quicksilver, quivering in the hands of angels.\textsuperscript{203} The comparison to the movements of fluid mercury suggests physical properties that defy laws of nature.

The spirit was thought to exit the body at death. Al-Ghazali describes four angels who pull the spirit from each of the hands and feet of the deceased.\textsuperscript{204} “The good soul slips out like the jetting of water from a waterskin, but the profligate's spirit squeaks out like a skewer from wet wool.”\textsuperscript{205} Having left the body, the spirit is taken to view the seven heavens and seven hells.

\textsuperscript{199} Halevi, \textit{Muhammad’s Grave}, 201.

\textsuperscript{200} Halevi, \textit{Muhammad’s Grave}, 202. On the relationship between نفس و روح and نafs and ruh, Jane Idelman Smith and Yvonne Haddad state, “The question of the relationship of \textit{nafs} and \textit{ruh}, soul and spirit, is a complex and difficult one in Islamic usage. Because the Qur’an does not explicitly use the term \textit{ruh} to refer to the spiritual aspect of human beings and because S 39:42 in comparing sleep and death talks about God’s keeping the \textit{nafs} of those who die, some writers have chosen to use the term \textit{nafs} when describing what the angel of death is responsible for removing from the body. Others, however, explicitly suggest that the \textit{ruh} is taken and the \textit{nafs} remains with the body. To complicate the issue further, one finds in many collections of narratives such interchanging usage that it is impossible to attempt to sort out a clear distinction between spirit and soul and this context…The majority of commentators and traditionalists seem to prefer to speak of that which remains after death as spirit.” Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, \textit{The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection} (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 36.

\textsuperscript{201} For example, Ibn Abi-al Dunya, believed that the spirit had both physical qualities and was intangible. Halevi, \textit{Muhammad’s Grave}, 201.

\textsuperscript{202} Smith and Haddad, \textit{The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection}, 37.

\textsuperscript{203} Smith and Haddad, \textit{The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection}, 37.


where they might go after the Resurrection. This is a brief sojourn, lasting only the duration of
the funerary procession. 206 By the time of the burial, the spirit has reentered the body, where it
will remain until the Resurrection. 207

While in the body, the deceased’s spirit retains every ability to feel earthly sensations,
including sight, sound, and touch. Ibn Abi al-Dunya (823-894), a tutor to the Abbasid caliphs,
recites the following anecdote: A man named Al-Fadl b. al-Muwaffaq attended a funeral without
visiting his father’s grave. Later, his father comes to him in a dream and asks him why he did not
stop by his plot. The son learns that his father retains his sight and can therefore see when he
visits the burial ground. 208 The dead can also hear. According to the hadith (sayings of the
Prophet Muhammad), the Prophet said of the dead, “You do not hear better than they do, though
they cannot reply.” 209

The dead can feel both pleasure and pain. The traditions express a great deal of anxiety
over this situation, which provoked such anguish that a term developed for the experiences
endured by the deceased: “tortures of the grave.” 210 While some authors contend that virtuous
individuals spend the intermediate state in a spacious, comfortable grave, many more sources,
including the earliest accounts, emphasize the misery experienced during burial. 211 Even the
innocent were feared to suffer. 212 In his collection of hadith, the jurist Malik ibn Anas (711-795)

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208 Leah Kinberg, “The Book of Dreams by Ibn Abi al-Dunya (Introduction and Text)” (PhD Diss.,
University of Michigan, 1977), no. 19. Leah Kinberg, “Interaction between This World and the
Grave*, 211.
210 عذاب القفر.
212 George Archer, *A Place Between Two Places: The Qu’ranic Barzakh* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press,
2017), 353.
writes, “Sa’id al-Mussayyib (d. 715) said, ‘Once I prayed behind Abu Hurayra over a child who had never done anything wrong. And I heard [Abu Hurayra] say, ‘O God, give him protection from the torment of the grave.’” Narratives describing al-barzakh describe truly horrific conditions: worms, scorpions, and snakes gnaw at sentient cadavers, sighted individuals lie alone in darkness, and (the most commonly noted punishment) the earth binds corpses so tightly that their bones crack and crumble, all while the alert, conscious spirit is inside and can feel the body splinter. This tradition reveals extreme anxiety over the pain and suffering of the intermediate state. Specifically, this belief system is consumed with the inevitable: the disintegration and decay of deceased bodies, even though they will rise again.

Islam was not the only medieval religion to hold beliefs and traditions that expressed concern over the condition of the body after death. The Western European and Byzantine Orthodox Christian traditions have a long history of anxiety over the putrefaction of corpses. In the fourth century, the influential theologian St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-395) buried his sister, Macrina, in the family mausoleum. Prior to the opening of the tomb, Gregory expressed fear—in fact, horror—at the prospect of seeing the decayed corpses of his parents. He writes:

When the prayer had come to its due close, fear entered my mind of transgressing the divine command, which forbids us to uncover the shame of father or mother. “And how,” said I, “shall I escape such condemnation if I gaze at the common shame of human nature made manifest in the bodies of my parents? Since they are all decayed and dissolved, as must be expected, and turned into foul and repulsive shapelessness.” As I thought of these things and the anger of Noah against his son was striking fear into me, the story of Noah advised me what was to be done. Before the lid of the grave was lifted sufficiently to reveal the bodies to our gaze, they were covered by a pure linen cloth.214

214 Καὶ ἐπειδή τὸ πρέπον ἡ προσευχὴ πέρας ἔλαβε, φόβος μὲ τὶς τῆς θείας ἐντολῆς εἰσέρχεται τῆς κωλυούσης πατρὸς ἢ μητρὸς ἀνακαλύπτειν ἀσχημοσύνην. Καὶ πῶς, ἔφην, ἔξω τοῦ τοιούτου γενόσωμα κατακρίματος, ἐν τοῖς τῶν γονέων σώμασι βλέπειν τὴν κοινὴν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως ἀσχημοσύνην, διαπέπτοκότων ὡς εἰκὸς καὶ λελιμένων καὶ εἰς εἰδεχθῆ καὶ δυσάντητον ἀμορφίαν μεταβληθέντων;
Gregory invokes the story of Noah, whose son Ham saw him naked (or even, in the view of some commentators, possibly raped him), violating the incest prohibition. In invoking a story about incest, the worst imaginable taboo, Gregory communicates the revulsion he feels toward the decaying body. His disgust is about physical decay—disfigurement and stench—as well as the fundamentals of corporeal vulnerability. Jean-Marie Mathieu proposes that by sexualizing decay, Gregory notes “l'universalisation de la honte de la nature humaine.” From germination to decay, Mathieu shows, humans’ humanity, their vulnerability to the corruption of sin and death, distresses Patristic writers. Gregory mitigates the situation by covering the bodies completely with a linen cloth, thus shielding them from his gaze. This is just one example of how material culture (in this case, a shroud) could be employed to mitigate anxieties relating to the bodies of the deceased.

Concern about corporeal decay was foregrounded in medieval Western Christian thought. Caroline Walker Bynum states that, “partition, decay, and digestion were the most fearful destruction twelfth-century writers could imagine.” In Western Europe, the Resurrection was thought to reverse these processes, saving the blessed from these most terrible fates. The Cistercian Bishop Otto of Freising (c. 1114-1158) describes the Resurrection as the triumph over bodily decay:

Ταῦτα δέ μοι λογιζομένῳ καὶ τῆς τοῦ Νῶε κατὰ τοῦ παιδὸς ἁγωνικῆς ἐπιτεινούσης τὸν φόβον συμβουλεύει τὸ πρακτέον ἢ ἰστορία τοῦ Νῶε. Ἐπεκαλύφθη γὰρ σινδόνι καθαρᾷ πρὶν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν γενέσθαι τὰ σώματα τῇ τοῦ πώματος ἐπάρσει καθ’ ἑκάτερον ἄκρον τῆς σινδόνος ἀντεισιούσης.


216 Mathieu, “Horreur du cadavre,” 313.
Bones that are dry because they no longer have in them the power of life, but have physically lost their freshness—grow sinews, are clothed with flesh, are covered with skin, are spiritually reanimated and finally are by divine power led forth from the tombs.\textsuperscript{218}

Otto’s discomfort over the condition of deceased bodies—specifically their disjointed, dry bones, their lack of “freshness”—is clear. This unease is about decomposition—partition and rot.

For many twelfth-century writers, Hell was a beastly mouth and belly, masticating and digesting sinners as the earth crumbles and corrodes corpses (Figure 37). For these theologians, salvation is regurgitation,\textsuperscript{219} the exorcising of the saved from the hellish, yet entirely earthly, partition of their flesh. Peter of Celle (c. 1115-1183), a Benedictine bishop, writes that:

\begin{quote}

The divinity which lay hidden in Jesus' flesh shattered the molars in death's mouth, when it rashly bit at the flesh of the Word…[Death] remembers that true confession and penitence have forcefully extricated countless souls from its womb and hellish belly…Let us ball up all [our prayers] into lumps to burst the innards of the devil, of death, and of hell, and with Daniel let us throw them into the mouth of the dragon.\textsuperscript{220}
\end{quote}

With gnashing teeth, death receives deceased individuals, who enter his “hellish belly.” Yet prayer allows the faithful an exit, to be spewed from this corrosive, digestive gut. Peter associates digestion with sin and wholeness with virtue. Anxiety about bodily decay is grafted onto conceptions of religious morality and divine judgment.

Nowhere are the associations of fragmentation with damnation and cohesion with salvation more palpable than in Byzantine and Western Christian Last Judgment imagery. The eleventh-century Last Judgment mosaic in Torcello (Figure 38), completed by Byzantine artists

\textsuperscript{218} Ossibus enim et aridis, quasi iam sementem in se amisso phisicae virore non habentibus, nervos succrescere, carne vestiri, cute superextendi, spiritu reanimari, postremo talibus de tumulis suis produci divina virtute predicit. Translation from Bynum, \textit{The Resurrection of the Body}, 184.

\textsuperscript{219} Bynum, \textit{The Resurrection of the Body}, 199.

\textsuperscript{220} Latens in carne Jesu divinitas molars noxas dentes in ore ipsius confregit, cum carnem Verbi morsu temerario momordit… verum paenitatum confessionem de utero suo et ventre infernali animas infinitas fortiter extraxisse meminit… Ex his omnibus offas dirumpentes interiora diaboli, mors et infemi conhchiamus, et in ore draconis cum Daniele projiciamus…Translation from Bynum, \textit{The Resurrection of the Body}, 199.
for a Western audience, features a gruesome portrayal of the damned souls in the afterlife. In the lower right level, parallel to the image of Abraham with the blessed in his bosom, three frames depict the excruciating torments of hell.221 Skulls float in darkness, their eyes crawling with worms. Dislocated heads swim in a sea of fire. Fragmented bones—skulls, hands, and feet—are piled at random. The agonies these figures endure are strongly associated with the physical decay that befalls deceased bodies.

Fear of putrefaction is also evident in an eleventh-century ivory from Constantinople depicting the Last Judgment (see Figure 7). While the diminutive souls of the blessed recline in the bosom of Abraham, as in the mosaic at Torcello, these figures are paralleled by the condemned in Hell. In contrast to the fleshy, almost cherubic blessed, the damned are corrupted by decomposition; they are piles of skulls. They enter Hell through the mouths of a multi-headed monster. Limbs poking out from the beastly jaws demonstrate that the behemoth crushes the deceased, fragmenting them as the earth reduces corpses to individual bones.

The tympanum of the west portal of the church of Sainte-Foy at Conques (c. 1135) (Figure 39) likewise depicts a structural antithesis between the blessed in paradise and the damned in Hell. On the left, Christ stands at the door to paradise, taking the hands of the saved as they enter. On the right, the doomed enter Hell through the gnashing teeth of a beastly mouth. While the blessed stand upright in elaborate architectural structures, the inhabitants of Hell are in a mangled pile, their limbs warped. Snakes crawl through and among them. They epitomize disorder and disintegration—the rot of sin—demonstrated here through digestion in the belly of Hell, but also evoking the rot of the corpse in the earth. The recurring use of motifs of decay surrounding the realms of Hell betrays a cultural anxiety surrounding bodily decay. This fear is

rooted in the idea that the body was essential to the conception of the self, both in this life and the next.\textsuperscript{222}

In contrast, the image of the Patriarchs in the Monastery of St. Antony and other pictorial and textual sources of the Coptic tradition acknowledge but do not emphasize anxiety about disintegration and putrefaction. Instead, this image conveys the Coptic iconography of salvation through emphasis on other forms of torture for the damned, specifically the burning pain of loneliness that comes from isolation from the larger community. Nineve, the poor soul in fiery Hell, suffers physically, but his body is whole. While flames encircle his corpse, he gestures physically, his hands and arms neatly defined. In contrast to images in the Latin and Byzantine tradition, the image in the Monastery of St. Antony does not imply that the damned undergo decay or disintegration of any sort. While the Latin and Byzantine images of Hell discussed above contrasted the wholeness of the garden with the disintegration of Hell, the image in St. Antony contrasts community (in the figures of the blessed in the arms of the Patriarchs) with isolation (in the figure of Nineve).

On the left of the tableau, the blessed sit together and share ripe fruit. To the right, Nineve in his blistering inferno embodies a visual and conceptual inversion. He gazes and reaches to the blessed and the Patriarchs, but they look at and gesture toward only each other. Paradise contains a community of the saved, from which Nineve is excluded. In her work on Coptic stelae, Thelma K. Thomas notes that “the funerary liturgy emphasized community in many ways—in its expression of the expectation of attaining the paradise of the saints as well as in its anniversary celebrations in churches for a veritable community of sleeping dead.”\textsuperscript{223}

\textsuperscript{222} Bynum, \textit{The Resurrection of the Body}, 225.
\textsuperscript{223} Thelma K. Thomas, \textit{Late Antique Egyptian Funerary Sculpture: Images for this World and for the Next} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 51.
Funerary rites emphasized individuals’ roles in the Christian community. Copts employed different prayers for each pillar of the religious community whether bishops, priests, monks, men, women, and children.  

Textual sources emphasize the role of the Coptic community in paradise. In the fragmentary *Life of Matthew the Potter* (sixth century), the saint describes a dream in which he visits heavenly paradise:

>I saw outside the gate of the monastery a large crowd of monks; they all came and they embraced me. They said to me, “You arrive at our congregation beautifully, so that you may accompany us to the Heavenly Jerusalem.”

St. Matthew is not alone as he crosses to the other side; his brethren accompany him. A large throng of monks warmly approaches him, emphasizing the communal aspect of paradise. The gathered community is reminiscent of the group of blessed individuals painted in the Monastery of St. Antony. Upon entering this realm of the afterlife, Matthew says:

>“Who are those who sit on their thrones?” They said to me, “All those you see are the fathers of the world, the archbishops, the priests, the bishops, in a word, the fathers of the monasteries and their sons who wear the habit.”

Matthew’s monk-guides note some of the groups that are mentioned in Coptic funerary prayers: archbishops, priests, bishops, and monks. Heavenly paradise thus maintains the structure of the

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226 ὕγ νε ναι ντειζε εγκνος σιχν νεγερονοσ. Πεκαλανα τε ναι ημιτον ετεκναν εροον ιτου νε νειοτε ηεκαν νεγενοικοπος κατε τετεγεροσ αγν νεγενοικοπος ζαπας ζαπλος νειοτε ημοναστηριον κατε νεγιμερε νοχίμα. Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne*, 733.
earthly Coptic community. Material attributes of clerical status on earth, thrones and habits, symbolically signify status in heaven.

In contrast, a story from the Life of Bishop Pisentius emphasizes the solitude of the deceased in hell. The bishop comes upon an ancient tomb filled with mummies. One of them speaks to the bishop, telling him of his tortured existence in hell. Although the mummy is one of many in the same tomb, his description of the afterlife mentions no one else; his only companions are his “tormentors.” Surrounded by his community of deceased mummies on earth, Pisentius is nonetheless solitary in death. The terror of social isolation is present in Byzantine conceptions of hell as well. According to Marinis, the images of hell that most frightened Byzantine viewers were not those depicting groups of sinners in scorching fire, but ones that depicted a solitary figure in a dark cave, “bound and isolated, with only his or her thoughts” (Figure 40).

Another stream of conceptions of the terror of hell is present in tenth-century Coptic wall paintings of hell from Tutun in the Fayum. The building, likely a church, is now lost, and all that remains to document the structure are fifteen black and white photographs taken in 1899, as well as copies of the inscriptions and a notebook detailing the excavation of the building. Despite this meager evidence, a rich scene of the damned in hell can be pieced together. A large, winged demon, labeled, “Lord Abbatôn, the angel of death, who respects not persons,” reigns over a

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See also Giamberardini, “La Sorte dei Defunti nella Tradizione Copta,” 172-175.
228 Marinis, Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium, 66.
flurry of sinners (Figure 41). They float below him, bound by ropes and collars. Marinis notes that Byzantine images of hell emphasized constriction, with the personification of Hades tightly gripping doomed souls. The bonds painted in Tutun may indicate similar fear of constraint, an anxiety that was also common in Islamic thought as noted above. In the Islamic tradition, fear of being bound and incapacitated was specifically associated with the grave.

The scene also depicts other punishments that are distinctly sensory. For example, one sinner (labeled, “the man who takes the wage of the laborers”) is depicted with bound hands and chained feet; he is throttled by a monstrous demon, whose hands surround his head (Figure 41, right hand side). Other corporeal tortures are endured by a man (“he who fornicates with a woman?”) and woman (“the woman who has given her breasts for ?”) whose genitals and breasts are attacked by snakes (Figure 42). Yet the tortures are unrelated to the bodily decay that so concerned other religious groups. This is clear from an image of a woman whose soul has been pulled from her mouth and is tormented by a demon (Figure 43). Both her body and soul, though undergoing torture, remain intact. The punishments are sensorial, but they do not lead to fragmentation and rot.

In Coptic theology, the deceased body was thought to be inert matter, largely powerless. An example of this attitude is present in the Logos of Theophilus, a text composed between the mid-sixth and tenth centuries that survives in a tenth-century manuscript from the Monastery of

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232 Marinis, Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium, 66.
233 ΠΡΩΜΗ ΕΠΒΥΚΗ ΝΝΕΡΚΑΤΗΣ
234 ΠΕΠΧΡΝΠΗΕ ΜΕΝΕΣΩΜΗ ΝΛΕΣΜΗ…ΤΕΣΩΜΗ ΕΝΤΑΣΙ ΤΕΣΚΙΒΕ ΝΠΛΕΣΜΗ. The female figure likely depicts a woman who did not breastfeed, as shown in Byzantine images. See Sharon Gerstel, “The Sins of the Farmer: Illustrating Village Life (and Death) in Medieval Byzantium,” inWord, Image, Number: Communication in the Middle Ages, eds., J. Contreni and S. Casciani (Florence: Sismel - Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2002), 211.
St. Makarius in Wadi Natrun (Vatican Copte 62). The Logos tells the story of the bishop John the Little, who builds a martyrion dedicated to the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace (saints who are depicted in the khurus of the Monastery of St. Antony, see Figure 17). John travels to Babylon, then part of the Sasanian Empire, to bring back the saints’ relics. However, when he reaches his destination, the saints tell him to leave the relics there. They say to him, “It is our souls which are speaking with you in glory, mouth to mouth, from the moment you came here until now. It is impossible for our bodies to be taken away from this place until the day of the Resurrection.” In other words, the souls of the saints have left their bodies, and their bodies have no efficacy. Only their disembodied souls can converse with pilgrims. The bodies cannot provide blessing until reunited with their souls at the Resurrection. Therefore, there is not merit in transporting them to Egypt.

Mary K. Farag shows that assertions about the inefficacy of relics resulted from dyophysite Christian claims to be in possession of a hand of the Hebrews, while Coptic Christians did not hold comparable relics. Yet the very concern over who possessed the relics speaks to interest in these bodies and, likely, widespread belief in their efficacy as transmitters of spiritual benefit and saintly intercession. This inconsistent attitude toward relics is also evident in the case of Shenoute. In his writings, the saint strongly objected to visiting martyr’s shrines and constructing shrines to house relics. He asked to be buried in an unmarked tomb but was instead laid to rest in an elaborate chamber that became an object of devotion. But it is unclear

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236 ⲡⲉⲛⲛⲯⲭⲏ ⲛⲉⲛⲁⲓⲧⲥⲁ ϫⲓ ⲛⲙⲁⲕ ϧⲉⲛⲟⲩⲱⲟⲩ Ⲝⲣⲟ ⲝⲟⲩⲃⲉⲣⲟ ⲗⲓⲧⲁⲕⲓ ♃ⲛⲃⲓ ♃ⲯⲓ ♃ⲟⲩ ♃ⲛⲟⲩ ♃ⲛⲩⲩ ♇ⲉ ϫⲉⲧⲁⲕⲓ ♃ⲛⲃⲓ ♃ⲯⲓ ♃ⲟⲩ ♃ⲛⲟⲩ ♃ⲛⲩⲩ ♇ⲉ ⲛⲙⲟⲛ �ıpⲏⲣⲉⲛⲥⲱⲙⲁ ⲝⲡⲁⲓⲙⲁ ⲝⲃⲟⲗ ⲝⲁⲡ ⩇ⲟⲟⲩ ♃ⲯⲁⲛⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ. Translation from in Farag, “Relics vs. Paintings of the Three Holy Children,” 269.
whether it was the body itself that was venerated or, as suggested in the *Logos of Theophilus*, the spirit, which could materialize at meaningful times and places.\(^{239}\)

**Conclusion**

The image of the Patriarchs in paradise at the Monastery of St. Antony suggests a mystical interpretation of the afterlife, one full of contradictions and ambivalences. Time and space are elided, the hereafter is sensorial but immaterial, and incorporeal souls reap physical rewards and punishments. These inconsistencies communicate the otherworldliness of the hereafter, its lack of adherence to earthly logic. Since the Coptic Church held no official position on the afterlife, the image in the Monastery of St. Antony was not strictly dogmatic and cannot be said to reflect the conventional views of medieval Coptic Christians. However, its general principles are echoed in multiple Coptic sources, both textual and visual. The intermediate state between death and burial was thought to take place in an entirely different realm, with an ambiguous conception of space-time. After death, Christian souls were thought to escape interred corpses. They exist in a suprasensory space. This is either paradise, where they join the otherworldly community of Christian dead and are embraced by the Patriarchs, or Hell, where they suffer in bleak solitude, their incorporeal souls enduring painful punishment. These beliefs and their visual expression connected Copts to coreligionists throughout the Christian *oikoumene* (the community of Christians throughout the known world). However, they also distinguished particularly Coptic conceptions and expressions of these shared traditions. Images depicting the afterlife often contain slight inflections in iconography that indicate distinctions in beliefs among individual

\(^{239}\) Farag, “Relics vs. Paintings of the Three Holy Children,” 262.
sects. Even very similar images can reveal divergences in belief, as members of different sects transposed their own expectations when viewing imagery, especially within sectarian spaces.

The Coptic belief in a spiritual materialism of the intermediate state is in contrast to the strongly materialist and corporeal conceptions of the afterlife espoused by other Christian sects. In particular, Copts held a strong differences with their Muslim neighbors in their beliefs about the materiality of the intermediate state. Medieval Islamic sources portray particular concern about the condition of body in the intermediate state, believing it to be capable of feeling the agonies of loneliness and decay. The differing beliefs between Copts and Muslims are of vital importance for the distinct meanings of the burial objects discussed in the following chapters. Though Christians and Muslims in the medieval Nile Valley deposited similar items in their burials, the compositions, styles, and iconographies of these objects held differing meanings, linked in each groups’ conceptions and concerns about the afterlife.
Part II:

Shrouding the Coptic Body
CHAPTER III

Beauty, Prestige, and Belief: Tiraz Textiles in Coptic Graves

In a 2005 study of textiles from the graves of the Coptic Christian Naqlun cemetery A in the Fayum region of Egypt, Gisela Helmecke wrote that the textiles “demonstrate the full domination of Muslim culture in Egypt in the 11th/12th centuries.” Indeed the findings substantiate this interpretation. The cemetery has revealed over 500 graves, many including textiles. This large corpus of material, in the form of garments, shrouds, and coffin covers, was invariably white (undyed). Some examples are plain, others are decorated with bands of inscriptions, pseudo-inscriptions, or strips of ornament (including, for example, geometric, floral, or faunal motifs). Textiles with bands of inscriptions or ornament are known in medieval Islamic tradition as tiraz (Figure 44). Conventionally, tiraz inscriptions were formulaic, including the name of the caliph and information about the textiles’ circumstances of production (including place and date). They were typically manufactured in caliphal workshops and often served as gifts from the caliph to his preferred subjects in recognition of political support, however they also became popular items of social prestige throughout society and were eventually produced and sold on the open market. The inscriptions were formulaic and in some cases employed pseudo-scripts (iconography that looks like script, but is illegible). Extant examples typically date from the ninth to thirteenth centuries. They seem to have been particularly popular for use in

burials. In addition to the finds from Naqlun, *tiraz* have been excavated in several other cemeteries, and other examples of these textiles, though un-provenanced, have stains that indicate they were used in burials (Figure 44).

Scholarly interpretation of *tiraz* in burial contexts has shown the material’s close connection to the strictures of Islamic *hadith* (traditions of the prophet) and the religion’s beliefs about the afterlife. But what are scholars to make of the use of *tiraz* in Christian graves? Do these objects suggest, as Helmecke argues, that Coptic Christians fully adopted material culture derived from Islamic systems of belief? I propose that we can amend Helmecke’s statement, and instead interpret the use of *tiraz* in Christian burials as an active choice on the part of both individuals and the community as a whole to portray particular beliefs and aspects of their identity. In this chapter, I analyze *tiraz* from Christian and Islamic burials. I approach the material comparatively, focusing on an Islamic burial from Istabl Antar, near Cairo, and a Christian burial from Qasr Ibrim in Lower Nubia. I consider the stylistic, iconographic, and material aspects of the *tiraz* and the contexts in which they were used to determine why members of each religion chose to be buried in these textile objects. Recognizing that the use of *tiraz* in burials was an Islamic innovation, a result of the textile type’s adherence to popular *hadith* and function in Islamic eschatology, I argue that Christians did not passively adopt this Islamic practice. They instead adapted the way *tiraz* textiles were used, the specific type(s) of *tiraz* employed, and the other objects used alongside *tiraz* textiles so as to fit with specifically Christian doctrines and social values.
Defining and Studying Tiraz

The term *tiraz* is thought to derive from the Persian word for “embroidery.” Contemporary scholars conventionally define *tiraz* as textiles with Arabic (or pseudo-Arabic) inscriptions; however, that definition is debated. In the medieval period, the term could refer to inscribed textiles and to their places of manufacture in state-sponsored workshops. The association of *tiraz* with caliphal workshops has led some scholars to place all luxury textiles produced in the medieval Islamic world under this rubric. Other scholars define *tiraz* more broadly to include objects in any media (e.g., textiles, papyri, ceramics) that (1) were produced in state-sponsored workshops and (2) include protocollary inscriptions. However, the term *tiraz* appears to have conveyed various meanings. In this thesis, I define *tiraz* as inscribed textiles of a type originally associated with caliphal production. The word “originally” is key to this definition because textiles with the same materials, techniques, and inscriptions became fashionable and were eventually produced for the masses, to be sold on the open market.

Protocollary *tiraz* inscriptions (inscriptions that adhere to formal governmental formulae) mention one of two types of workshops: the *tiraz al-khassa* (private) or the *tiraz al-amma* (public). According to Jochen Sokoly, the caliph directly oversaw production in the *tiraz al-*

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242 Mickelwright, for example, considers the term too broad, comprising “a hodgepodge of silk, linen, and cotton fabrics and various colours and weaves, decorated with woven, embroidered, and painted bands that may contain inscriptions, pseudo inscriptions, or ornament of other kinds.” Nancy Mickelwright, “*Tiraz* Fragments: Unanswered Questions about Medieval Islamic Textiles,” in *Brocade of the Pen: The Art of Islamic Writing*, ed., Carol G. Fisher (East Lansing, MI: Kresge Art Museum, Michigan State University, 1991), 32.
245 Jochen Sokoly, “*Tiraz* Textiles from Egypt: Production, Administration, and Uses of *Tiraz* Textiles from Egypt under the Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid Dynasties” (DPhil diss., Oxford University, 2001), 4.
*khassa* while the broader government managed the *tiraz al-amma*. However, some *tiraz* inscriptions mention no workshop; they were likely produced in workshops entirely unaffiliated with the government.\(^{246}\) It is crucial to note, however, that both “official” caliphal textiles (whether *tiraz al-khassa* or *tiraz al-amma*) and “unofficial” imitations are part of the same socio-artistic tradition. Moreover, the two types of textiles were common in both Christian and Islamic graves. As such, I include “unofficial” textiles that were inspired by caliphal prototypes in my definition of *tiraz*.

“Official” caliphal *tiraz* inscriptions often include the date and place of manufacture, providing substantial information about circumstances of production. The majority of extant *tiraz* cloths date from the second half of the ninth to the late twelfth centuries. Though *tiraz* was woven across the Islamic world, most examples were recovered in Egypt because of the dry climate. While archaeological provenience for these pieces is rarely known, it is believed that thousands of pieces were excavated from the cemeteries of Fustat (near Cairo). Unsurprisingly, most of these were fabricated in Egypt, but many exceptions are attested.

Early studies situated *tiraz* textiles narrowly within the realm of Islamic political history, as historical documents, and disassociated the epigraphic evidence from its material and functional contexts.\(^{247}\) Later studies, such as Ernst Kuhnel and Louisa Bellinger’s groundbreaking 1952 catalog of Islamic textiles in the Textile Museum in Washington D.C., include technical and functional analysis.\(^{248}\) However, these and other publications of the


twentieth century focused on single collections, limiting their usefulness.\textsuperscript{249} In work published in the early 2000s, Sokoly aimed to resolve this situation by surveying almost 2,000 textiles from over a dozen collections and in light of textual sources about the \textit{tiraz} system.\textsuperscript{250} By studying such a large corpus of objects together with texts, Sokoly was able to understand their meanings in their cultural context. He demonstrated that the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1250) used the production and administration of \textit{tiraz} to reinforce their hegemony over their expansive empire. He also showed that in the Fatimid Caliphate (969-1171), \textit{tiraz} were thought to imbue wearers with blessing connected with the Ismaili Shi’i caliph, who was thought to be a semi-sacred figure.

Major studies of \textit{tiraz} typically include only examples that are dated or have protocollary inscriptions and ignore textiles produced outside official caliphal channels and those with unconventional inscriptions or pseudo inscriptions, despite the fact that they were part of the same artistic phenomenon and used in the same contexts. Sokoly studied \textit{tiraz} in context, but because he limited his study to textiles with protocollary inscriptions, he excluded a large number of extant examples. Additionally, his concentration on textiles used in Islamic graves, combined with later published discoveries at the Christian cemeteries of Naqlun and Qasr Ibrim, has left open the question of Christian usage. This chapter builds on Sokoly’s work to study the use of \textit{tiraz} in burials in the wider, diverse Egyptian society, particularly among the Coptic Christian community.\textsuperscript{251}

\textsuperscript{249} Sokoly, “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,” 802.
\textsuperscript{250} Sokoly, “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt.”
\textsuperscript{251} Textual evidence also exists for the use of inscribed textiles in Egypt’s vibrant Jewish community. See discussion in S.D. Goitein, \textit{A Mediterranean Society: the Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed in the documents of the Cairo geniza: volume IV: daily life} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 150-225. Full discussion of the medieval Egyptian Jewish material is beyond the scope of this chapter.
The History and Meaning of Tiraz

*Tiraz* developed from pre-Islamic robes of honor, which were garments sovereigns gave to subjects and foreign rulers in recognition of fealty, a tradition that was prevalent across Eurasia. While there is no evidence that pre-Islamic robes of honor had inscriptions, they often displayed images of the sovereign. It is possible that text conveying imperial authority supplanted such imperial effigies on Islamic robes of honor (Arabic *khil’ā*، خِلْعَة). This process is apparent in other categories of early Islamic material culture. In 691, the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ordered that Arabic be adopted as the language of all imperial administration, an edict that led to Arabic calligraphy replacing other scripts (e.g., Greek in formerly Byzantine territories, Middle Persian in formerly Sasanian territories) and, in some cases, imagery. As a result, the name of the caliph gradually supplanted figural imperial imagery on coinage.

Textiles may have developed in a similar way. The later Islamic historian al-Bayhaqi (994-1066) specifies that ‘Abd al-Malik’s decree also applied to inscriptions on garments and tapestries, although al-Baladhuri (806-892) and al-Tabari (939-923) list only coinage and papyrus as being affected.252 Nevertheless, the belief that *tiraz* inscriptions supplanted imperial portraiture can be traced back to at least the later medieval period. Yedida Kalfon Stillman has noted that the Mamluk historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) wrote that “the pre-Islamic Persian kings used to make *tiraz* with the images and likenesses of monarchs or other images and likenesses specifically designated for that use, and later the Islamic monarchs substituted for that the inscribing of their names together with other words of good omen or praises of God.”253

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253 وكان ملوك الجماهير في الإسلام يكتسبون ذلك الديموغرافيا بصورة الملك والشبايهم أو أشكال وصور معينة لذلك ثم أعناض ملوك الإسلام ذلك بكتب اسمائهم مع كلمات أخرى تجري مجرى القال أو السباع وكان ذلك في الدولتين من ابنه الأمور وأفخم الأحوال وكانت الدور
According to Ibn Khaldun, medieval viewers believed inscriptions on textiles displaced imperial portraiture on earlier robes of honor.

The reforms of ’Abd al-Malik established Arabic text as an imperial symbol. In the period following the edict, the name of the caliph served as a key signifier of his authority. The public pronouncement of the caliph’s name in the *khutba* (Friday sermon), *sikka* (coinage), and *tiraz* were the ruler’s prerogatives and symbolized his legitimacy. The inscribed name of the caliph on *tiraz* marked the recipients as supporters and intimates of the caliph, connecting them to the caliphal persona.254

The Abbasids were the first Islamic dynasty to codify the robe of honor system and employ it throughout their vast empire. By the ninth century, medieval historians wrote of caliphs regularly bestowing silk garments – along with crowns, jewelry, and swords – to esteemed subjects.255 The members of the caliph’s inner circle even became known as “those who wear the *khil’a*.”256 While the sources do not specify what these garments looked like, robes of honor likely included *tiraz* textiles.257 The Abbasids delegated responsibilities over their large empire and employed robes of honor to symbolize political authority throughout their territories and beyond. The name of the caliph inscribed on garments worn by regional rulers communicated that they served the caliph and had been delegated regional authority.

In Egypt during the Tulunid period (868-905), *tiraz* continued its function as robes of honor and gained particularly strong relationship to statements of political power. In 868, when

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255 Sourdel, “Robes of Honor,” 138-139.

256 الهُلَعَةُ أصحاب

257 Sokoly “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,” 226.
the Abbasid Empire had dissipated and local governors held all but nominal control, the
Egyptian governor Ahmad ibn Tulun stopped paying taxes to the central government at Baghdad
and raised an army against the caliphate, establishing an entirely independent regime. To
pronounce his sovereignty, Ibn Tulun dropped the name of the Abbasid caliph from the *tiraz*,
*khutba*, and *sikka*. Many *tiraz* produced by the Tulunid regime have material and stylistic
features that differ from Abbasid prototypes. These characteristics include the tapestry weave in
wool and linen and richly variegated palettes of blues, yellows, greens, and sometimes reds.

Though the Abbasids regained control of Egypt in 905, another dynasty of governors of Abbasid
Egypt, the Ikhshidids (935-969), obtained power over Egypt just thirty years later. Though they
ruled largely independently, the Ikhshidids departed from the model of Ahmed Ibn Tulun by
continuing to have *tiraz* inscribed in the name of the Abbasid caliph.

After gaining control of Egypt in 969, the Fatimid Caliphate continued to produce *tiraz* as
part of the relationship of the textile type to political power and the *khīla* tradition, employing
inscriptions on both clothing and other media for the purposes of propagating their Ismaili Shi’i
theocracy. Irene Bierman has explored in particular detail the ways that the Fatimids employed
“public text” to communicate and propagate their authority. In their use of public text, the
Fatimids departed from prior dynasties by enlisting text in intersectarian spaces to spread
propaganda. They incorporated in official processions *tiraz* produced from luxury materials
such as silk and gold to display the wealth of their empire. The name of the caliph inscribed in

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such lavish materials associated affluence and prestige with the caliphate. The Fatimids adapted the content of prior protocollary tiraz inscriptions, adding Shi‘i phrases such as, “People of the House” emphasizing the caliph’s status as imam through his lineage reaching back to the Prophet through his cousin and son-in-law, ‘Ali.\textsuperscript{263} In the Fatimid’s Ismaili Shi‘i belief system, the caliph-Imam was a semi-sacred figure capable of bestowing baraka (blessing, برکة) on chosen subjects. For this reason, khi‘la, especially castoff garments from the caliph’s own collection, were thought to transmit baraka.\textsuperscript{264} Following in the tradition of the edict of Umar, the name of the caliph was akin to the caliph’s presence. Therefore, garments inscribed with his name were thought to transmit baraka as well.

**Burial Dress in Egypt in the Late Antique and Early Islamic Period**

Textiles are a fragile medium and survive only in unique circumstances, including the dry sands of Egypt. Such circumstances are rare, and few sites preserve textiles. Because many late antique and medieval Egyptian textiles were not systematically excavated, specific locations and contexts of discovery are often unknown.\textsuperscript{265} However, a burial context can be presumed from bodily fluid stains on many examples and similarities to the few examples known to have been excavated at specific sites. For example, the excavator of Antinoe (Sheikh ‘Ibada), Albert Gayet (1856-1916) exhibited several mummies from that site in Paris, but he picked and chose how he


\textsuperscript{265} In fact, full garments were often cut into round or rectangular pieces that isolated ornamental features. On this point, see Thelma K. Thomas, “From Curiosities to Objects of Art: Modern Reception of Late Antique Egyptian Textiles as Reflected in Dikran Kelekian’s Textile Album of ca. 1910,” in *Anathemata Eortika: Studies in Honor of Thomas F. Mathews*, 300-12, eds. Joseph D. Alchermes, Helen C. Evans, and Thelma K. Thomas (Mainz: Ph. von Zabern, 2010).
arranged the mummies, so the displays were not an accurate portrayal of the particulars of burial dress at Antinoe.\textsuperscript{266} Because most examples of late antique and early medieval textiles were essentially plundered, dating of such textiles has been very difficult and often inconclusive. In recent years, more scientific excavations (including those discussed below) have helped establish chronologies for textiles, but many of these excavations are of rubbish heaps rather than burials.\textsuperscript{267} They therefore give information about textiles that were used in daily life and eventually discarded, but not examples in which people chose to bury their dead. However, a few cemeteries have been excavated in recent decades, including Fag al-Gamus (first through eighth centuries)\textsuperscript{268} and Naqlun cemetery C (tenth through fourteenth centuries).\textsuperscript{269} Thorough reassessments of past excavations at sites such as Antinoe, Matmar, and Mostagedda aim to reconstruct the contexts in which burial textiles were used.\textsuperscript{270} Finally, radiocarbon dating has provided reliable dates for some textiles that lack provenance documentation but can be associated with burials based on physical features.\textsuperscript{271}

Pre-Christian Egyptian societies eschewed the use of everyday clothing in burial. Only rectangular shrouds of pure linen were thought appropriate to wrap bodies in burials of the

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\textsuperscript{267} Frances Pritchard, \textit{Clothing Culture: Dress in Egypt in the First Millennium AD} (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 2006), 15-16.
\textsuperscript{270} Maximilien Durand et Florence Calament, eds., \textit{Antinoé, à la vie, à la mode: visions d'élégance dans les solitudes: exposition, Lyon, Musée des tissus, du 1er octobre 2013 au 28 février 2014} (Lyon: Fage, 2013); Alexandra D. Pleșa, “Religious Belief in Burial: Funerary Dress and Practice at the Late Antique and Early Islamic Cemeteries At Matmar and Mostagedda, Egypt (Late Fourth-Early Ninth Centuries CE),” \textit{Ars Orientalis} 47 (2018).
\end{flushright}
Pharaonic, Hellenistic, and Roman eras.\textsuperscript{272} In contrast, Egyptians of the early Christian period found everyday dress in various materials, such as wool, linen, and silk, to be suitable for the grave.\textsuperscript{273} Some individuals were buried in layers of clothing. For example, Gayet noted that women of Antinoe usually wore two overtunics and two undertunics, the latter of which was typically sleeveless and made of a lightweight material.\textsuperscript{274} Many of these garments show evidence of use in life, such as wear and repair marks.

The typical daily ensemble of the age consisted of a tunic and mantle.\textsuperscript{275} Tunics uncovered from these cemeteries were woven to shape in a wide “T-shape” and woven of a linen or wool ground with wool (or, less often, silk) decoration on the collar, sleeves, shoulders, and knees (known as \textit{segmenta}), as well as bands running down the chest (known as \textit{clavi}) (Figure 45). The variety of designs on these appliqués is diverse, ranging from figural Christian and mythological scenes to Nilotic and other imagery of natural abundance to geometric designs. The written word is uncommon on late antique Egyptians textiles. When writing does occur, it serves a labeling function for images rather than as the main iconographic element itself (Figure 46). Not everyone was buried wearing such items. In some cases, such as at el-Deir in the Kharga Oasis and possibly Matmar and Mostegadda in Middle Egypt, bodies were buried unclothed under shrouds.\textsuperscript{276}

Shrouds were an essential element of late antique Egyptian burial practice. Individuals interred at most sites, including Fag al-Gamus, Qarara, and the Monastery of Epiphanos at

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{272} South, “Roman and Early Byzantine Burials at Fag El-Gamus, Egypt,” 50.
\item \textsuperscript{273} South, “Roman and Early Byzantine Burials at Fag El-Gamus, Egypt,” 50. Pritchard, \textit{Clothing Culture}, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{274} C.T. Rooijakkers, “Dress Norms and Markers: a comparative study of Coptic identity and dress in the past and present” (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2016), 185.
\item \textsuperscript{275} Rooijakkers, “Dress Norms and Markers,” 169.
\item \textsuperscript{276} Pleşa, “Religious Belief in Burial,” 25.
\end{itemize}
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Thebes, were wrapped in multiple layers. In many cases, these coverings were rectangular cloths, but in other instances, they were reused clothing and furnishing textiles. Often, fabric scraps were placed under shrouds on the face and feet so that the body maintained its shape when wrapped (Figure 47). Kristen Hacken South argues that padding the face, which she terms “face bundles” was a Christian innovation, while Alexandra Pleșa proposes an antecedent in pre-Christian anthropoid sarcophagi, which had protruding heads and feet. In most cemeteries, including Fag al-Gamus, Matmar, Mostregadda, the Monastery of Epiphanius, and Qarara, the shrouded body was bound with slim red, white, or brown ribbons in a lattice pattern (Figure 48). These tapes, referred to in Coptic as ρειⲱⲥ, were likely purpose-woven for use in burials. Additionally, mats could be used as an exterior wrapping layer.

Accessories of the dead may have served social and/or ritual purposes. For example, bodies in monastic cemeteries such as Deir el-Bahari and the Monastery of Epiphanius often wear leather aprons on belts. The women and children of Antinoe often wore bourrelets, rolled fabric worn like a worn around the head like a wreath. (Figure 49) Females buried at Matmar and Mostagedda often had sprang caps, items which seem to have been associated with marriage

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280 Winlock and Crum, The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, Volume 1, 71. Winlock and Crum note that “the frequent mention of ροⲩς and ρ[ⲓⲣⲓⲱ] together…prob. shows that the former is ('grave)-clothes, shroud,' the latter the tapes, or ribbons bound around the outside of these.” Herbert E. Winlock and Walter E. Crum, The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes. Volume 2: Coptic Ostraca and Papyri (New York: Reprinted by Arno Press, 1973), 245.
and motherhood (Figure 50).\textsuperscript{284} The occupants of the graves did not necessarily wear these ornaments. A sprang cap was positioned next to the shoulder of a female body in Mostagedda.\textsuperscript{285} Jewelry at Matmar and Mostagedda was both worn and laid on bodies. Dozens of pillows have been uncovered from graves. The deceased may have rested their heads on them. Additionally, stalks of reed and rush and palm leaves could be positioned within the shrouds, serving as support when wrapping the body rather than as grave goods.\textsuperscript{286}

\textit{Tiraz in Medieval Burials}

Scholars have identified a change in the dress of deceased bodies around the year 1000. As C.T. Rooijakkers observes, “an entirely new dress vocabulary was introduced.”\textsuperscript{287} Most bodies of this period, both Christian and Muslim, were buried in undyed shrouds and clothing, with a \textit{tiraz} inscriptions serving as the main form of embellishment. Rooijakkers writes that the change in dress “was undoubtedly related to the conquest of Egypt by the Fatimids and Cairo becoming the seat of power of their Empire, as well as the concomitant increased Arabization and Islamization of Egypt.”\textsuperscript{288} It likely also had much to do with changing burial practices brought about by the growing Muslim community’s adherence to burial practices described in the \textit{hadith}.

Sokoly was the first scholar to study \textit{tiraz} textiles within their final phase of use. He noted that the vast majority of extant medieval Egyptian \textit{tiraz} textiles are of a particular type: they have undyed linen or cotton grounds combined with decorative inscriptions and/or bands (see Figure 43, Figure 51). In contrast, descriptions of \textit{tiraz} in medieval literature describe

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\textsuperscript{284} Pleşa, “Religious Belief in Burial,” 31. \\
\textsuperscript{285} Pleşa, “Religious Belief in Burial,” 31. \\
\textsuperscript{286} Pleşa, “Religious Belief in Burial,” 24. \\
\textsuperscript{287} Rooijakkers, “Dress Norms and Markers,” 193. \\
\textsuperscript{288} Rooijakkers, “Dress Norms and Markers,” 193.
\end{tabular}
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opulent garments with bright colors and golden thread (Figure 52). Most of the plainer textiles were likely uncovered from burials. However, these textiles are much more rarely found in settlement contexts, such as rubbish heaps in towns, which contain everyday textiles that were discarded. Sokoly suggests that medieval Muslims in Egypt specifically chose to use simpler *tiraz* textiles as burial garments, and that they were motivated to do so by Islamic beliefs.\(^\text{289}\)

As mentioned above, *tiraz* developed from robes of honor, and the name of the caliph inscribed on these textiles created a bond between ruler and subject. According to Sokoly, “caliphs were considered to be in a ‘sacred’ position. Places as well as objects were consecrated when they were connected with the caliphs.”\(^\text{290}\) As noted above, the name of the caliph was analogous to his presence. By extension, being in contact with this name could connect an ordinary individual with the caliph’s sacredness. For this reason, *qadis* (judges) sometimes kissed the caliph’s name on documents or the ground on hearing his name.\(^\text{291}\) *Tiraz*, having the name of the caliph, could also connect wearers with his sacred presence.

Sokoly argues that for this reason *tiraz* was appropriate to be worn in the hallowed atmosphere of the grave. From the time of the Prophet, high-ranking men furnished honored individuals with burial shrouds. Muhammad himself gave his cloak to a man who had approached him and whispered in his ear. A crowd became angry that the man had requested the Prophet’s garment, until the man revealed that he planned to use it as a shroud.\(^\text{292}\) During the Rashidun Caliphate (the caliphate after the death of Muhammad, when four companions of the

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\(^{290}\) Sokoly, “Between Life and Death,” 75.

\(^{291}\) Sokoly, “Between Life and Death,” 75.

Prophet ruled Islamic territories in succession), the caliph Umar I sent five garments from the treasury for Zaynab bint Jahsh (d. 641), a wife of Muhammad, to use as shrouds.\(^\text{293}\) Zaynab had previously prepared her own shrouds, but as she neared death, she began to wonder if the caliph would provide her with new ones, an act which, unbeknowst to her, he did.\(^\text{294}\) This tradition assumed added weight, Sokoly argues, during the Ismaili Shi’i Fatimid dynasty, because the caliph was believed to possess not just sacredness, but also *baraka*, which he could convey to esteemed subjects through a variety of means, including the bestowal of caliphal clothing. Ordinary individuals might have desired *baraka*, but not been able to procure textiles directly from the caliph or his stores. They might have instead assumed the practice of employing inscribed textiles as burial shrouds.\(^\text{295}\) Since the name of the caliph on *tiraz* served as a proxy for his physical presence, the textiles might have been thought to transmit *baraka* to the deceased. Sokoly proposes that “‘Imitation’ *tiraz* with benedictory non-caliphal or pseudo-inscriptions must have conveyed the same notions.”\(^\text{296}\)

Sokoly argues that the practice of using *tiraz* in burials began in the Fatimid period, when the practice of the caliph providing shrouds for the deceased became common, because the Fatimid caliphs, being descendants of the Prophet, could provide *baraka*. He notes that:

There is quite consistent evidence suggesting that only the Prophet, his companions and members of his family (including the Fatimids) presented their own garments to living individuals and for burial purposes...Such evidence for the Umayyads and Abbasids is inconsistent. Only a few references to al-Walid's presentation of used clothes being [given] to living individuals exist. No evidence for the presentation of funerary outfits under the Umayyads and Abbasids is known to me.\(^\text{297}\)

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\(^{295}\) Sokoly, “Between Life and Death,” 77.
\(^{296}\) Sokoly, “Between Life and Death,” 77.
\(^{297}\) Sokoly, “*Tiraz* Textiles from Egypt,” 226.
Indeed, several written examples of Fatimid caliphs providing burial garments for esteemed individuals do exist. For example, in 991 the caliph al-Aziz offered fifty burial shrouds and other goods for the funeral of Ya'qub ibn Killis, his vizier.\(^{298}\) The caliph al-Hakim provided a shroud and coffin for al-Akhram, a man assassinated during a caliphal procession in which al-Hakim had invited him to take part.\(^{299}\) Finally, the tenth-century *Sirat al-Ustadh Jawdhar*, a biography of al-Ustadh Jawdhar (d. 973), a trusted servant to several Fatimid caliphs, notes that Jawdhar requested the use of a caliphal textile for a burial shroud, “so as to be blessed with it.”\(^{300}\) The use of the term *liatabaraka*, with the root, ب ر ك (to bless) suggests the reason that Jawdhar requested a caliphal shroud.

Sokoly’s argument is highly persuasive, but leaves an important issue unresolved: how should scholars interpret the hundreds of extant pre-Fatimid *tiraz* textiles, which name Sunni caliphs who were considered sacred Imams? Sokoly’s catalog of 1,799 textile textiles includes 1,133 examples of pre-Fatimid (Umayyad, Abbasid, and Tulunid) textiles, and 665 examples from the Fatimid period. These numbers provide evidence that *tiraz* textiles were frequently produced in the pre-Fatimid period, a fact that is widely known. Less widely recognized, however, two features suggest that the pre-Fatimid textiles were employed in burials. First, they share broad stylistic similarities with the later Fatimid examples, including the presence of inscriptions on plain, undyed grounds. This is the stylistic type that Sokoly convincingly demonstrated was found frequently in burials, but very rarely in rubbish heaps. Second, the

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\(^{298}\) Sokoly, *“Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,”* 225.

\(^{299}\) Sokoly, *“Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,”* 225.

presence of bodily fluid stains on hundreds of the pre-Fatimid textiles, attests beyond a doubt to their final use in burials.

Sokoly implies that these earlier textiles may have been employed in later, Fatimid-era burials. It is well known that in the medieval period textiles were precious objects conserved and reused for generations. There is even textual evidence of tiraz bearing the names of past caliphs being employed in diplomatic settings, where no expense was spared, and material culture was orchestrated to convey particular meaning. For example, when the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 929-932) hosted Byzantine envoys in Baghdad, he dazzled them with tens of thousands of luxury textiles, many embroidered with the names of his predecessors. The antique tiraz may have conveyed the longstanding affluence and power of his empire. It is also worth noting that some tiraz textiles have been radiocarbon dated to after the reigns of the caliphs whose names are inscribed on them. This suggests that they were made subsequent to the caliphs’ reigns (or that the radiocarbon dating was inaccurate), thus calling into question scholars’ tendency to rely on the inscribed dates in order to establish the date of production of tiraz. It is theoretically possible that during the Fatimid period, Egypt’s majority Sunni population employed antique Abbasid-era textiles in burials or commissioned ones with prior Abbasid caliph’s names. Sokoly’s thesis that the use of tiraz in burials came into fashion in the Fatimid period, motivated by Shi’i conceptions of baraka, suggests that Sunnis may have appropriated this Shi’i practice.

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301 See below for further discussion of this point.
I propose instead that *tiraz* could have held many of the same meanings in Sunni burials that Sokoly highlighted in Shi’i ones. The transition in burial dress between late antiquity (including the early Islamic period) and the medieval *tiraz* on which this chapter focuses may have been more gradual, taking place over the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. Perhaps it was crystalized by the presence of the Shi’i Fatimids in Egypt. When the Fatimids conquered Egypt in 969, the Caliph al-Mu’izz marched into Fustat followed by the shrouded bodies of his ancestors. This procession emphasized his lineage leading back to the Prophet Muhammad, a keystone to Ismaili legitimacy.  

Leor Halevi suggests a different if related function for fine shrouds in the context of Islamic eschatology. As discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, according to Islamic doctrine deceased individuals were sentient and could suffer “tortures of the grave.” These were the physical and mental torments of burial, including the decay of the body and loneliness of the soul. Halevi suggests that shrouds served to comfort the deceased in *al-barzakh* (the intermediate state between death and the resurrection). He notes that “the verb chosen to designate properly expansive shrouds, ‘wasi’a,’ or ‘yasa’u,’ is the same verb used in the prayer seeking relief from the pressure of the earth on the corpse.” According to the tenth-century Shi’i writer Ibn Babawayh al-Sadduq (c. 923-991), the Prophet Muhammad bestowed burial shrouds on Fatima bint Asad, the mother of ’Ali (the son-in-law of Muhammad, whom Shi’is consider the Prophet’s rightful successor), so that she would not suffer in the grave.

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303 See below for further discussion of this procession.
305 عذاب الفقر
Halevi focuses on the social function of shrouds in the early Islamic period. He notes that from both a religious and a social point of view, “procuring for oneself a shroud was the most important preparation a Muslim could undertake for burial.” Many jurists constituted shrouds as debts, a designation that meant arranging one’s own shrouds was crucial since deceased individuals with unsettled debts were believed to endure discomfort in the afterlife because of them. In fact, Muslims who died with outstanding debts could face tortures of the grave. Even the Prophet would not hold funerary prayers for individuals with outstanding debts. When individuals died prior to preparing their shrouds, their parents or children were typically responsible for the vital task of procuring their shrouds.

Procuring shrouds for another individual created “unique material bonds” between donor and recipient. For this reason, the literature mentions individuals who refused shrouds from unsuitable benefactors. The importance of the status of one’s shroud donor is also evident in the stories that recount Muhammad and the caliphs arranging shrouds for important individuals, which augmented the status of the deceased. Providing shrouds could also enhance the status of the donor if the recipient was of high standing, because, as Halevi argues, donating shrouds created a “social link surviving death.” They would be rewarded for an act such as this in the afterlife. It is thus possible to see tiraz shrouds employed during the reigns of various medieval Islamic dynasties as creating a link between the caliph, other members of the political establishment, and the deceased. The uses of tiraz in Fatimid-era burials are revealed to be not

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308 Halevi, Muhammad’s Grave, 85.
309 Halevi, Muhammad’s Grave, 101.
310 Halevi, Muhammad’s Grave. 101.
311 Halevi, Muhammad’s Grave, 85.
312 Halevi, Muhammad’s Grave, 85.
313 Halevi, Muhammad’s Grave, 109.
only exceptional, following distinctly Ismaili Shi’i beliefs, but also conventional, perpetuating meanings and precedents from other Islamic sects and dynasties.

**Arabic Tiraz in Islamic Contexts: The Burial Ground of the Fatimid Caliphs**

An example of *tiraz* shrouds in an Islamic burial comes from Istabl Antar in Fustat. The significance of the *tiraz* in this burial can be productively compared to the meaning of *tiraz* in a Christian burial in Qasr Ibrim, Lower Nubia, later in this chapter. Istabl Antar was excavated in the 1990s with modern techniques and rigorous documentation, affording unprecedented information about how shrouds were employed in Islamic burials.\(^{314}\) The tomb was a large mausoleum that had been built in the Abbasid era and was reused in the Fatimid period.\(^{315}\) It included several rooms, each of which had multiple burials.\(^{316}\)

One burial was particularly well preserved (*Figure 53*). Burial 49 contained a coffin with the body of an old man who had a white, henna-dyed beard. He was wrapped in a reed mat, then in three *tiraz* shrouds. The top-layer shroud is extremely finely embroidered in blue silk chain stitch.\(^{317}\) The letters of its kufic inscription have elongated vertical extensions (*Figure 54*).\(^{318}\) The inscription includes the date 320/932. The ground of the textile is a *mulham* (a tabby weave with a fine silk warp and coarser cotton weft).\(^{319}\) The textile encircled the head of the deceased. The middle layer shroud is made of linen with an inscription. The epigraphy suggests a date in


the tenth century or early eleventh century. The bottom layer shroud is inscribed with the name “al-Ma’add.” This name could refer to either Caliph al-Mu’izz (931-975) or Caliph al-Mastansir (1029-94), as both used the *laqab* (regnal name) al-Ma’add.\(^\text{320}\) The excavators believe the inscription refers to al-Mu’izz based on the chronological context of the tomb. Like the top-layer shroud, this textile encircled the head of the deceased.

The textiles in the burial follow strictures described in the *hadith*. While various traditions existed on the numbers and types of shrouds with which the Prophet was buried, it was commonly thought that he wore three shrouds.\(^\text{321}\) They were thought to have been white in color.\(^\text{322}\) In fact, al-Bukhari’s *hadith* notes several times that Muhammad told followers to wear white clothing both in life and death.\(^\text{323}\) For example, he writes that Muhammad recommended, “Of your clothes wear the white ones, for they are the best of clothes, and shroud within them your dead.”\(^\text{324}\) A well-known tradition claims that Muhammad was buried in three Yemenite garments constructed of white Arabian cotton that were woven in the town of Suhul.\(^\text{325}\) The large white textiles of tomb 49, including cotton and very little colored decoration, follow this example. However, Halevi notes that “religious scholars were not of one mind. In opposition to those who wished for plain white shrouds, some held that anyone with wealth (*sa’\(\alpha\)*) should not be rebuked for choosing a shroud of silk.”\(^\text{326}\)

The body in tomb 49 was also wrapped in accordance with Islamic practice. Islamic law required that bodies be entirely covered from head to toe.\(^\text{327}\) Because Muslims did not typically

\(^{320}\) Sokoly, “*Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,*” 231.
\(^{321}\) Grutter, “*Arabische Bestattungsbräuche in frühislamischer Zeit,*” 80-82.
\(^{322}\) Grutter, “*Arabische Bestattungsbräuche in frühislamischer Zeit,*” 85.
\(^{323}\) Grutter, “*Arabische Bestattungsbräuche in frühislamischer Zeit,*” 85.
\(^{324}\) أَلْبَسْنَا مِنْ ثِلاَبِكَ الْبَيْضَةَ،ْ فَأَنْتَ مِنْ خَيْرِ ثِلاَبِكَ،ْ وَكَفَّنَا فِيْهَا مَوْتَائُكَ Halevi, “*Muhammad’s Grave,*” 203.
\(^{325}\) Halevi, “*Muhammad’s Grave,*” 151
\(^{326}\) Halevi, “*Muhammad’s Grave,*” 205
\(^{327}\) Sokoly, “*Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,*” 250.
use coffins, shrouds needed to separate the body from the earth. Stories from the hadith express the importance of properly covering deceased bodies. When the martyr Mus’ab ibn Umayr died in the Battle of Uhud (625), his burda (cloak), was too short to serve as a suitable shroud, since it could not cover the martyr’s whole corpse. Muhammad chose to cover Mus’ab’s head with the shroud and improvise by wrapping the feet with rushes. When another of the Prophet’s companions did not have a suitably large shroud, he was buried at night (presumably because of his inadequate shroud). Muhammad expressed his displeasure in a sermon. “If one of you enshrouds his brother, he should do it well.” The body from Istabl Antar was shrouded with care. Textiles encircled the deceased’s head, the tiraz inscription of each cloth layered over his eyes. Cotton batting between the second and third layers padded out the face, a practice reminiscent of the pre-Islamic Egyptian custom of creating face-bundles. From the shoulders down, a reed mat wrapped the deceased’s body. The natural woven material of the mat is reminiscent of the rushes in the tradition about the death of Mus’ab.

Depictions of cadavers in medieval Islamic art demonstrate the importance of enveloping the entirety of a deceased body with shrouds. An image from a thirteenth-century manuscript (1237) of the Maqamat al-Hariri, a compendium of fifty tales in which a certain Abu Zayd al-Saruji travels the world deceiving others by assuming new identities, shows two men lowering a corpse into a tomb (Figure 55) (Paris, Bibliothéque national de France, MS Arabe 5847, fol. 29v). The body is completely enshrouded in plain white fabric. The shape of the body, in particular its head and feet, remains visible, but details are covered; the wrapping appears tight and multilayered so that no face can be seen or arms or legs can fall out. The monotone scheme

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and oblong shape of the corpse contrasts with the varied colors and sense of movement of the crowd of people surrounding it. Likewise, these spectators’ sharp expressions are in opposition with the expressionless corpse. This discrepancy emphasizes the fact that his face is covered.

Fold lines on the painted shrouds affirm their materiality in parallel to the draped garments of the onlookers, yet the tightness of the cloth over the wrapped body is seen in the faintness of the painted lines on the shrouds in contrast to the thick lines on the garments of the living, which indicate the shadows of a loose drape. The corpse is front and center on the page, the focus of the image. Seen in relation to the storyline of the maqamah—in which Abu Zayd adopts the persona of an old man and obtains alms after giving an eloquent speech on the meaning of death and judgment—the visual foregrounding of a completely shrouded individual may reference the concealment of Abu Zayd’s identity, but from a socio-historical angle, the image depicts a body that has been properly shrouded for an Islamic funeral.³³¹

The individual in tomb 49 appears to have been of very high status. In fact, Gayraud has suggested that the tomb and its larger context may have belonged to the members of the Fatimid royal family whose bodies were brought to Egypt in coffins from Ifriqiyya when the Caliph al-

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Mu’izz entered Cairo.\textsuperscript{332} The burial resided in a large, opulent tomb, a structure that was originally built in the Abbasid period and restructured and reused in the Fatimid period.\textsuperscript{333} He was buried in a carefully constructed coffin, which suggests his high social position (\textit{Figure 56}). Coffins were rarely used in Islamic burials because Islamic law required that bodies be placed directly in the earth. In practice, coffins were employed only in cases where bodies travelled great distances, for elite processions or for protracted travel, perhaps to preserve the body.\textsuperscript{334} Roland-Pierre Gayraud, the excavator of tomb 49, writes that the only other Islamic burial found with a coffin is al-Hadra al-Sarifa, which contained the body of the heir to the caliph al-Hakim. The deceased individual in tomb 49 could have been of similar status, a member of the Fatimid elite.

After the Fatimids conquered Egypt, they brought the bodies of their ancestors, the former caliphs, to their newly founded capital city of Cairo. In \textit{Itti‘az al-hunafa}, al-Maqrizi reports that al-Mu’izz, “entered [Cairo] accompanied by all those who had gone [earlier] to receive him, along with all his sons, brothers, paternal uncles and the rest of the sons of al-Mahdi. The coffins of his ancestors, al-Mahdi, al-Qa’im and al-Mansur, were also brought with him.”\textsuperscript{335} In transporting the bodies of his ancestors to his new capital city, al-Mu’izz stressed the Shi’i element of his reign, that he was the true caliph and imam because his genealogy stretched back to the Prophet through Ali. Viewers would have seen a majestic procession, populated with

\textsuperscript{333} Gayraud et. al., “Istabl ‘Antar (Fostat) 1994,” 1.
both living and dead members of the triumphant caliphal family. Once in Cairo, the bodies were
buried on the grounds of the palace in the area called Turbat al-Za'faran.336 The graves were a
frequent part of palace ceremonial. In his Khitat, al-Maqrizi writes that al-Mu’izz visited the
burials to distribute alms every time he returned to the palace, as well as each Friday and on the
major holidays eid al-Fitr and eid al-Adha.337 The burials of the ancestral Fatimid caliphs, then,
were not idle plots. They were active, present locations of Fatimid ceremonial and memory. It
follows that the objects in the burials, including the textiles, though unseen, held important
meaning as ritual objects.

If the man buried in tomb 49 was a member of the Fatimid elite, perhaps even a caliph, it
is surprising that he was buried encircled in a tiraz shroud listing a date prior to the Fatimid
conquest of Egypt. Since the shroud lists the date 932, scholars have assumed that it is Abbasid
tiraz. It is puzzling that a member of the Ismaili Shi’i elite would be buried in both Sunni and
Shi’i tiraz. According to Sokoly, the man buried in tomb 49 was either “indifferent” to the
sectarian difference in the medieval Islamic world, or the people who shrouded and buried him
did not know the meaning of the inscriptions on the textiles.338 Sokoly notes that the Abbasid
tiraz could have been collected from the stores of the treasury, coming into the hands of the
Fatimids after their conquest of Egypt.339 In this case, the benefit of the association with the
caliphal treasury would have outweighed the detriment of the inscription of the name of an
Abbasid caliph.340

336 Al-Maqrizi, Towards a Shi’i Mediterranean, 104.
337 Al-Maqrizi, Towards a Shi’i Mediterranean, 104.
338 Sokoly, “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,” 239.
339 Sokoly, “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,” 239.
I disagree with this argument. Perhaps a regular member of society would find the association with kingship, status, and power significant enough to surmount sectarian differences, but it is extremely unlikely that a member of the Fatimid elite would be indifferent to Abbasid *tiraz*. Indeed, as seen in the case of Ahmad Ibn Tulun, embroidering *tiraz* in one’s name was an unambiguous way to assert sovereignty. According to the historian Ibn Zulaq (c. 919-996), even prior to their takeover of Egypt, the Fatimids produced and distributed *tiraz* in the name of caliph al-Mu’izz in the well-known Egyptian production centers at Tinnis, Damietta, al-Qays, and al-Bahnasa.341 By exercising this caliphal prerogative prior to their official rule over Egypt, the Fatimids evinced their right to rule and bolstered support for their revolution. After their conquest of Egypt and founding of Cairo, the Fatimids continued to employ the art of the *tiraz* to emphasize their place as stewards of the true caliphate. They invested foreign princes in their *tiraz* garments and draped the Ka’aba in their name. The dynasty even publicly destroyed Abbasid *tiraz* as a spectacle of power over their supposedly illegitimate enemies. Al-Maqrizi tells the story of an Abbasid ambassador en route to North Africa in 1051. He carried with him a diploma of investiture and an Abbasid banner and robes of honor for his host, the Zirid emir al-Mu’izz b Iladis (1008-1062), who had just renounced allegiance to the Fatimids and taken up with the Abbasids. The ambassador was captured and brought to Cairo, where the diploma,

341 Al-Maqrizi, *Towards a Shi’i Mediterranean*, 211. An example of such a textile exists today, inscribed with the name al-Mu’izz, but dating to 966, prior to the takeover of Egypt (Washington, D.C., Textile Museum, acc. no. 73.632). Al-Mu’izz ruled from 953-975, so this was likely *tiraz* that he had woven in Egypt prior to his conquest of the region. It is unclear how the Fatimids managed to inscribe Egyptian *tiraz* in their names before they controlled the territory. It is possible that Shi’i separatists established *tiraz* workshops creating propaganda in the lead up to the Fatimid conquest. Jonathan Bloom, “The Mosque of the Qarafa in Cairo,” *Muqarnas* (1987): 7-20 suggests a propaganda campaign in relation to the cult of ‘Alid saints in the decades leading up to the Fatimid conquest, though Christopher S. Taylor, “Reevaluating the Shi’i Role in the Development of Monumental Islamic Funerary Architecture: The Case of Egypt,” *Muqarnas* (1992): 6-7 has argued strongly against this thesis. It is also possible that no such pre-conquest Fatimid Egyptian *tiraz* existed, and that both Ibn Zulaq’s statement and the extant textile are falsifications aimed at bolstering Fatimid power.
banner, and robes of honor were set afire within the Fatimid palace precinct.\footnote{Sanders, “Robes of Honor in Fatimid Egypt,” 229.} Burning a symbol of Abbasid authority on a site embodying the Fatimid theocracy was the ultimate symbol of political and theological supremacy. It would, then, be highly unlikely for a Fatimid official, perhaps even a caliph, to be buried in Abbasid \textit{tiraz}, brandishing this garment as the outer shroud in the hallowed and highly carefully composed environment of the grave.

Instead, it is possible that the \textit{tiraz} was not inscribed in the name of the Abbasid caliph, but was indeed Fatimid \textit{tiraz}, from the period prior to the conquest of Egypt. The Fatimids ruled over Ifriqiya from 909-969 from a series of capitals, including Raqqada, Mahdia, and Mansouria, before conquering Egypt and establishing Cairo as their capital city in 969. Already in Ifriqiya, the Fatimids claimed that their regime held the distinction of being a caliphate. As such, they assumed the prerogative of inscribing the \textit{tiraz} in their name, perhaps beginning this practice as early as 908, a year before to the flight of the Aghlabid emir, their predecessor in the region of modern-day Tunisia.\footnote{Isabelle Dolezalek, “Textile Connections? Two Idrīṣiyyan Church Treasuries in Norman Sicily and the Problem of Continuity across Political Change,” \textit{Al-Masāq} 25.1 (2013): 96.} Already prior to the Fatimid’s rise to power, Ifriqiya produced \textit{tiraz}. The Andalusian writer al-Bakri (1040-1094) notes Kairawan held a \textit{tiraz} workshop near the site of the palace city of Raqqada, a mill that may have been established by the time of Hisham (691-743).\footnote{Serjeant, \textit{Islamic Textiles}, 182.} Mahdia and Susa each likely had a \textit{tiraz} factory as well. No inscribed textile definitively associated with Fatimid Ifriqiya has been identified thus far.\footnote{Dolezalek, “Textile Connections,” 96.} The only example known to have been produced in the Ifriqiyan \textit{tiraz} is the Marwan \textit{tiraz}, which dates to 744-750 (\textbf{Figure 57}).\footnote{On this textile, see Mackie, \textit{Symbols of Power}, 52-59.}

The outer shroud on the individual in tomb 49 was made of \textit{mulham} (a mix of cotton and silk). Sokoly believes that this fabric “had to be” made in Iraq or Iran, because most embroidered

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mulham was made there.\textsuperscript{347} He is correct that mulham is often associated with production in Iraq or Iran. But that does not mean cotton-silk textiles could not have been produced elsewhere. Both silk and cotton were widely employed in Ifriqiyan mills. Yaqut al-Hamawi (1179-1229) notes that mulberry trees grew in that region and silk was produced locally.\textsuperscript{348} Ibn Hawqal (d. ca. 978) noted that silks were exported from North Africa, and that Gabes was particularly well known for production in this material.\textsuperscript{349} It is worth noting that the later historian Shihab al-Din al-’Umari (1300-1349) wrote of a textile type produced in Ifriqiya that was made of silk and cotton, or silk and white, red, or green wool, which was termed safsari.\textsuperscript{350} In any case, the base fabric could have been imported. North Africa was cosmopolitan, a Mediterranean commercial hub. The geographer al-Idrisi (1100-1165) described Susa as having “many wares. Travelers come and go from it with cloth, such as various kinds of garments and turbans, called after it, a fine and precious kind of ware.”\textsuperscript{351} Indeed, the Marwan tiraz, the only textile definitively associated with the tiraz at Ifriqiya, is thought to have been made in greater Iran and imported into Ifriqiya, where it was inscribed.\textsuperscript{352} Could this have happened with the outer shroud of the individual in tomb 49?

Indeed, if the textile is tiraz inscribed in the name of the Abbasid caliph, the only plausible explanation is that the textile served as spolia. Spoliation is the practice of reusing material from an enemy in order to assert dominance over them. Objects are often booty from

\textsuperscript{347} Sokoly, “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,” 231.
\textsuperscript{348} Serjeant, Islamic Textiles, 181.
\textsuperscript{349} Serjeant, Islamic Textiles, 180.
\textsuperscript{350} Yedida Kalfon Stillman, “Female Attire of Medieval Egypt: according to the trousseau lists and cognate material from the Cairo geniza” (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1972), 62.
\textsuperscript{351} \textsuperscript{351} Yedida Kalfon Stillman, “Female Attire of Medieval Egypt: according to the trousseau lists and cognate material from the Cairo geniza” (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1972), 62. 
\textsuperscript{352} Mackie, Symbols of Power, 54.
war or plunder. They serve as a trophy in their new context, asserting the triumph of the victors. As Paul E. Walker notes, the Abbasid-Fatimid rivalry “played out through many similar examples involving stolen objects, sacred relics and souvenirs of power.” In an essential example, in 932 the Fatimids captured from the Abbasids the Dhul’l-Fiqar, the sword of the Prophet then, decades later, brandished the sword in battle, thus emphasizing both their prior triumph over enemies and their true, direct link to the Prophet. But other examples demonstrate that less essential objects had meaning as well. In 1058, the Turkish military commander Arslan al-Basasiri captured Baghdad, imprisoned the Abbasid caliph al-Qa’im, and allied himself with the Fatimid Caliphate. Al-Basasiri looted the Abbasid palaces, and the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir chose select objects from the booty to bring to Cairo. The historian al-Maqrizi lists the following objects: a turban and cloak belonging to al-Qa’im and a lattice screen behind which he reclined. Walker proposes that “These clearly possessed special meaning because of their close (personal?) identification with the Abbasid caliph.” Walker notes that what the Fatimid caliph really wanted was possession of al-Qa’im himself, to either serve as a vassal ruler under the Fatimids in Iraq or serve the Fatimids in Egypt, riding before the Fatimid caliph in processions. The presence of a former Abbasid caliph in the procession of the (rightful) Fatimid caliph would mark the former’s subservience as well as the just triumph of Fatimid Shi’i rule. Perhaps the Abbasid *tiraz* in tomb 49 served a similar function, coming before (on the top layer of) the Fatimid *tiraz*, demonstrating the superseding of Abbasid power and triumph of the Fatimids.

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In any case, the use of such textile would demonstrate the possession of the object, and therefore Fatimid possession of symbols of Abbasid power. This in itself emphasized Fatimid superiority. If the textile was looted from an Abbasid palace, its use would also recall such a siege, and therefore Abbasid weakness. Walker notes that in the context of the Abbasid-Fatimid rivalry, “Just as power accrues through possession, it diminishes in proportion to each item lost.” The presence of a symbol of Abbasid power in a Fatimid setting, then, emphasized both the power of the Fatimids and the weakness of the Abbasids. Indeed, additional sources suggest that tiraz could serve such purposes. The historian Ibn Taghribirdi (1411-1470) writes that later in al-Mustansir’s reign, the economic consequences of a famine made the caliph sell the property of his treasuries. This material included garments looted from the Abbasids during the reign of al-Ta’i (r. 974-991). The Fatimids kept these garments in their treasuries out of hatred for the Abbasids, believing that possessing them showed their power over the illegitimate caliphate. As in the example from earlier in al-Mustansir’s reign, this is yet another instance of the use of foreign textiles for the purposes of Fatimid propaganda.

The opening of the Nile canal was an important ceremony that aimed to spread the message of Fatimid power to individuals within and beyond Egypt. The Persian traveler and poet Naser-e Khosraw (1004-1088) attended the ceremony in 1047. He described the sumptuous display as follows:

When the sultan [i.e. caliph] mounts, ten thousand horses with gold saddles and bridles and jewel-studded reins stand at rest all of them with saddle-cloths of Byzantine brocade and buqalamun [multicolored fabric] woven seamless to order. In the borders of the cloth are woven inscriptions bearing the name of the sultan of Egypt.

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356 Walker, “Purloined Symbols of the Past,” 381.
357 Serjeant, Islamic Textiles, 157.
That the cloth was imported from Byzantium showed its luxurious and exotic nature. At the same time, the fact that the Byzantine cloth was inscribed in the name of the Fatimid caliph suggests his primacy over the material culture of his Byzantine rivals. Nasir notes that “the whole population of old and new Cairo”\(^{359}\) beheld the procession, as did foreign dignitaries, “a contingent of princes from all over the world—the Maghreb, the Yemen, Byzantium, Slavia, Nubia, and Abyssinia.”\(^{360}\) The local population and foreign dignitaries would have noticed the Byzantine textiles under the control of the Fatimids and born witness to their power.

The *tiraz* shrouds in tomb 49 serve as an example of how these objects were employed in Islamic burials, and what their potential symbolism and meaning was in that context. The *tiraz*, in its simple undyed state, the number of shrouds employed, and the ways in which these shrouds were wrapped, followed strictures of the *hadith*. It thus adhered to traditional Islamic practices around death and burial. In its use of both contemporary and antique *tiraz*, the burial textiles emphasized the supremacy of the Fatimid regime. If the outer shroud dating to 932 is Ifriqiyan Fatimid, the textile would have recalled the longstanding power of the regime and ties back to the past caliphs, thus evoking the long line of Fatimid power leading back to Muhammad through Ali. If the shroud is instead inscribed in the name of an Abbasid caliph, its use in burial 49 would have emphasized Fatimid supremacy over the prior regime in Egypt and rival caliphate. The following section turns to the use of similar *tiraz* shrouds in Christian burials. I show that Christians made adaptations in the ways these objects were employed in order to express unique meanings.

\(^{359}\) Naser-e Khosraw, *Travels*, 50.
\(^{360}\) Naser-e Khosraw, *Travels*, 49.
Arabic *Tiraz* in Christian Contexts: The Cathedral Cemetery in Qasr Ibrim

*Tiraz* shrouds were not exclusive to Islamic graves. Although few Christian burial sites of the post-Abbasid Islamic era have been found, these sites include hundreds of graves that have yielded extant, well-preserved textiles, and many of these textiles are *tiraz*. The sites dot the Nile Valley, from Egypt to Nubia, which was not under Islamic hegemony but, as is discussed below, had close cultural and economic links to the caliphates. The graves are of elite and non-elite individuals. It seems clear that, throughout the Nile valley, both Christians and Muslims of various social levels wore *tiraz* to the grave. The cemetery of Naqlun in the Fayum region dates from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries. Over 500 graves, many including textiles, have been excavated there by the Polish Center of Mediterranean Archaeology. The excavators believe this was a layman’s cemetery. Qasr Ibrim, in Lower Nubia, on the other hand, was a cemetery of elite ecclesiastics. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, scholars have shown that Christians and Muslims wore the same basic textile garments in the grave. However, close study of select Christian burials demonstrates that Christians adapted these items to serve their own beliefs about their community and afterlife, while continuing to employ pre-Islamic funerary practices.

Qasr Ibrim is an urban site in Lower Nubia near the southern border of Egypt. The site, which was continuously occupied from the Napatan (700-300 BCE) to the Ottoman periods, lies on the frontier between Egypt and Nubia, 250 km south of Aswan and about 825 km south of Cairo. In the wake of the construction of the Aswan High Dam and the flooding of Lake Nasser, the Egypt Exploration Society began excavations at the site in 1961.\(^{361}\) In the medieval period,

the site was part of the state of Makuria (also known as Dotawo, Δωτάῳ in Old Nubian), a
Christian kingdom that held close ties to Islamic Egypt and may have controlled vassal status.\textsuperscript{362} Qasr Ibrim was one of the largest urban centers in Makuria. It was particularly important as an ecclesiastical site, one of seven episcopal sees in Makuria. The bishops of Ibrim were second only to the bishops of Faras.\textsuperscript{363}

The \textit{tiraz} textiles discussed in this section come from burials in the so-called cathedral cemetery (\textbf{Figure 58}). This graveyard is located within the grounds of the great cathedral of Qasr Ibrim, a church that likely served only clergy, with lay people attending smaller churches in the area.\textsuperscript{364} The graves contained burials of high-ranking ecclesiastics. Stelae recovered from the tombs note that many of the interred individuals had served as bishops.\textsuperscript{365} The graves were of different structural types and placed in three areas in and around the main cathedral: 1) mud-brick tombs situated near the West Tower of the church, 2) rock-cut tombs placed near the Small Church area, and 3) six rock-cut graves in two crypts of the cathedral itself.\textsuperscript{366} While the burials in the crypts contained no textile remains, the other internments, which have been dated to the tenth to twelfth centuries, contained rich deposits, including \textit{tiraz}. I propose that the remains suggest that the ecclesiastics of Qasr Ibrim chose to be buried in \textit{tiraz} because the textiles suggested civic and ecclesiastic authority.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{362} On the history of Makuria and its relationship to Egypt, see the introduction to this dissertation.
\item \textsuperscript{363} Elizabeth Grace Crowfoot, \textit{Qasr Ibrim: The Textiles from the Cathedral Cemetery} (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2011), 4.
\item \textsuperscript{364} Adams, \textit{Qasr Ibrim. The Late Mediaeval Period}, 25.
\item \textsuperscript{365} William Y. Adams, \textit{Qasr Ibrim. The Earlier Medieval Period} (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2010), 56.
\item \textsuperscript{366} I will not discuss the 1372 burial of Bishop Timotheos because it is outside the timeframe of this dissertation. On that burial, see Elizabeth Grace Crowfoot, “The Clothing of a 14th Century Nubian Bishop,” in \textit{Studies in Textile History}, 43-51, ed. Veronika Gervers (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1977).”
\end{itemize}
One burial in the West Tower area, termed burial C by the excavators, was particularly well preserved. According to the excavation report, a whitewashed tomb decorated with quotations from the gospels in Sahidic Coptic contained the remains of a middle-aged man with close-cropped brownish-grey hair. He wore a shirt of white linen embroidered with kufic, linen trousers fastened with a leather belt, and fingerless linen gloves. A leather cross, known as a schema, hung from his neck. Several shrouds wrapped the corpse. Closest to the body was a white linen sheet with a fringe at one end that was “worked in coloured threads.” Three other linen sheets wrapped the body, each containing a red kufic inscription. These were folded over the feet and sewn up the sides, creating a pocket in which the body was inserted. After the excavation of the cathedral cemetery, which lasted from 1963-1966, the majority of the textiles from this area remained in Qasr Ibrim and were reburied with the ecclesiastics’ bodies. Some, however, were brought to England for study and publication. While Elizabeth Crowfoot notes that, “it is not always clear” which items were brought back, based on descriptions of items in the excavator’s notebook, she believes that three coverlets (QI.T/26, 27, 30) and a tunic (QI.T/23) (Figures 59, 60, 61, and 62) were from burial C. A large, brocaded cloth (QI. T/21) (Figure 63) also remains from the burial, as do two carpets that lined the floor of the tomb. These items, plus the excavation report describing the burial, give a vivid picture of an elite ecclesiastical burial in Qasr Ibrim.

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368 Crowfoot, Qasr Ibrim, 11.
369 Crowfoot, Qasr Ibrim, 11.
All the inscribed textiles were produced in diaphanous tabby weave linen. The calligraphy is embroidered in red silk, employing couching, split, running, and double running stitches.\(^{370}\) The inscriptions of the coverlets QI.T/26 and QI.T/27 are legible. They read:

…Victory from God to the Servant of God (the Imam, Abu) Ali al-Mansur, the Imam al-Hakim bi-amr-Allah, son of al-Aziz bi-Allah…(QI.T/26)\(^{371}\)

Victory from God to the Servant of God and His Friend, al-Mansur bi-Allah, the Imam al-Hakim bi-amr-Allah (blessings) of God on them and on their fathers altogether…(in the year 3xx) (QI.T/27)\(^{372}\)

This text follows the classic *tiraz* formula. The addition of phrases mentioning the father of the caliph and his ancestors is demonstrably Shi‘i, emphasizing the caliph’s ancestral right to power though his familial link to Muhammad. Both coverlets list the caliph al-Hakim (r. 996-1020) as being in power at the time of production. This gives the burial a *terminus post quem* of 996. The inscription on the tunic (QI. T/23), on the other hand, may suggest earlier production. Its squat, spindly *kufic* is barely legible, but may read as the following, “…Victory from God to Abdullah…Commander of the Faithful…in God.”\(^{373}\) Lisa Golombek and Noha Sadek, who completed the translation, note, “We can only guess that these words occur here. I would date this to the early 10\(^{th}\) century. With a stretch of the imagination I might see the caliph al-Muqtadir bi-Allah in this. Virtually unreadable.”\(^{374}\) This textile, then, may have been produced between the years of 929-932, the years of the reign of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir, during the period of the caliphate’s waning authority in Egypt. Like the outer shroud from Istabl Antar, this textile

\(^{370}\) Crowfoot, *Qasr Ibrim*, 28.


\(^{373}\) Crowfoot, *Qasr Ibrim*, 28.

\(^{374}\) Crowfoot, *Qasr Ibrim*, 28.
may have been an antique. However, given the illegible, indecipherable nature of the inscription, the dating and age of the textile at burial is uncertain.

Both burial C at Qasr Ibrim and the Istbl Antar burial discussed above contained similar burial textiles, including tiraz from early Fatimid Egypt (mid- to late tenth century) and pieces that were (or, in the case of Qasr Ibrim, may have been) antiques when interred in the grave. The Istabl Antar and Qasr Ibrim tiraz share similarities in epigraphy, the content of the inscription, and the technical characteristics of the cloth. The similarities between the Qasr Ibrim textiles and tiraz found in Egypt continue. For example, the content of the inscription on coverlet QI.T/27 is almost identical to an example in Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. (acc. no. 73.42), a textile that scholars have postulated came from Islamic burials around Fustat.

It might seem surprising that this textile object—so similar to objects some 825 km away in Fustat, and likely made in a tiraz workshop in Lower Egypt—is found in Lower Nubia. In fact, it is not unusual that this kind of textile was employed in Qasr Ibrim. Egypt and Nubia were closely tied in economic and trade interests. From the time of the Islamic conquest of Egypt in the 640s until the demise of the Fatimid caliphate and coming of the Ayyubid sultanate in the 1170s, the relationship between Egypt and Makuria was governed by the baqt (from the Greek πάκτον), a treaty that allowed Makuria to remain Christian in exchange for economic concessions.

Makuria provided her Islamic neighbors with a certain number of slaves per year and received goods in return. According to the historian and patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church, Michael the Syrian (1126-1199), these items included “many measures of grain from

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375 For more information on this treaty, see the introduction to this dissertation.
Egypt, measures of olive oil, vessels and precious raiments.” The *tiraz* textiles at Qasr Ibrim, then, may have arrived in Nubia as the “precious raiments” included in the *baqt* payments.

The caliphal administrations of Egypt may have viewed the textiles and other luxuries provided in the *baqt* as a type of robe of honor provided to a client ruler. As discussed above, in the medieval Islamic world, rulers invested their vassals—in this case, the Nubian kings—with robes of honor, ensembles commonly including *tiraz*. These items, inscribed with the caliph’s name, were considered a visual statement of the Nubian kings’ allegiance to the caliphate, as well as the caliph’s recognition of his regional authority and commitment of protection from the caliph’s forces. Robes of honor were often presented along with other valuable gifts, including objects fabricated from precious metals and stones. Nubian royalty were among the favored individuals to receive costly textiles from the caliphs. In 835, King Georgius I of Makuria sent his son, later Georgius II, to Baghdad to settle a dispute with the Abbasid caliph over the *baqt*. According to Michael the Syrian, the caliph presented Georgius with, “plenty of expensive gifts of gold and silver. He also gave him raiments, musk and ambergris (perfume) and ten bedecked camels especially for the riding of kings. He ordered that he [Georgius] should be honored in all the towns until he enters his land and also that he should be given thirty dinars daily for his expenses.”

Textiles for elite garments, then, were among the precious gifts provided to Georgius. The context of the gifting suggests that the textiles functioned as a robe of honor. In his description of Georgius’s meeting with the caliph, Michael lists three types of “rewards” that the caliph gave the prince: 1) the physical gifts (including the garments), 2) esteem in the eyes of

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378 Michael I, the Syrian, *The Syriac Chronicle of Michael Rabo (the Great)*, 568.
the caliph, and 3) the caliph’s protection while Georgius traveled outside his home state of Makuria. The material gifts, then, are part of a “package” that also includes esteem and protection. By sporting the physical trappings of caliphal favor, Georgius would advertise his privileges of caliphal protection and honor. The gifts were a physical manifestation and attestation of the caliphal authority, which would have then led people to protect and provide for the Makurian prince.

Jay Spaulding has noted that, while early scholars saw the baqt as a tribute paid from a subordinate vassal state to its powerful overlords, it is unlikely that medieval Nubians interpreted the treaty in this manner. The best-known medieval Arabic sources that discuss the baqt, such as the work of al-Maqrizi, do view the Nubians as the subordinate party in the agreement, but it is likely that the baqt held different meanings to different commentators. From a Nubian perspective, Spaulding shows, the baqt would have been considered a treaty between equally powerful states. Even prior to the advent of Islam, the Nubian kingdoms exchanged luxury objects with their northern neighbor, and Makuria had similar arrangements with other neighboring states. Indeed, Spaulding notes that the baqt “was a typical expression of the system of diplomatic gift exchanges sponsored by Northeast African kings.” In other words, the objects obtained from the baqt would have been interpreted as prestigious diplomatic gifts exchanged between partners. Frequent diplomatic visits, letters, and gift giving between monarchs characterized statecraft in Northeast African agrarian states. These gifts, which monarchs commonly requested, signaled equality and esteem rather than subordination. A

380 Spaulding, “Medieval Christian Nubia and the Islamic World.”
monarch asking for too much could seem like a “demand for tribute.” Thus, while the textiles provided from the caliphate to Makuria as part of the baqt would have been interpreted by the Islamic state as robes of honor that may have signaled vassal status, the Nubians may have understood them differently. Assessing the historical situation from the Makurian perspective, we can understand the tiraz found in Qasr Ibrim not as symbols of Islamic Egyptian hegemony but of Nubian political power and agency in the larger Mediterranean world.

High-ranking ecclesiastics were key authority figures in Nubian society. While much is still unknown about medieval Nubian culture, it is believed that Church and king were thought to be ultimate rulers over a disenfranchised populace. Ordinary members of society may have been considered property of the king, slaves who were unable to own land. Clergy were exempted from this subordination, having their own, parallel, hierarchy in the church. It is thought that clergy lived, worked, and prayed separately from the Nubian public. It is possible that the bishops obtained such textiles from the king who received them through the baqt.

In addition to their status as symbols of prestige, the tiraz in burial C may have held apotropaic meaning. The tiraz were not the only inscribed textiles found in the cathedral cemetery at Qasr Ibrim. Giovanni Ruffini notes that a tradition of inscribed objects in Nubian burials, thought to have been apotropaic, predates the appearance of Christianity in the region and the arrival of Islam to the north. Textiles following this tradition were found in burials in

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Qasr Ibrim and Gebel Adda (located 50 km south of Qasr Ibrim on the east bank of the Nile).³⁸⁷ In their formal and technical aspects, they differ greatly from *tiraz*. While *tiraz* in burial contexts are characterized by the primary feature of short lines of woven or embroidered script, the Old Nubian textiles have large blocks of text written in ink. In the Qasr Ibrim example, the text forms the shape of a cross, which covers most of the textile (Figure 64).³⁸⁸ Ruffini notes that the use of inscribed material of various media in the Nubian material culture of death and burial is extremely common.³⁸⁹ For example, following Jacques van der Vliet, Ruffini notes that the walls of the tomb of the Bishop Georgios in Dongola are inscribed with long prayers to the Virgin.³⁹⁰ Ruffini believes that the Qasr Ibrim and Gebel Adda shrouds are part of a tradition in the Nile Valley in which inscriptions about the Virgin are employed in Nubian burial settings.³⁹¹ While a part of a different tradition, and therefore incorporating different visual, textual, and material features, the *tiraz* textiles in Burial C may have recalled this longstanding Nubian apotropaic tradition.

The ecclesiastic in burial C does not appear to have been interred in his full liturgical vestments. While the clothing of Nubian monks and deacons is not entirely understood, the clothing of bishops is well known from depictions in wall paintings. Such a costume for a bishop, depicted in a wall painting from Faras Cathedral (Figure 65), may have included the following elements: a *sticharion* (tunic), a *scapular* (a long garment placed under the *epitrachelion*), an *enchirion* (ceremonial napkin), a *phelonion* (a sleeveless

³⁸⁸ Ruffini, “Qasr Ibrim’s Old Nubian Burial-Shroud,” 55.
³⁸⁹ Ruffini, “Qasr Ibrim’s Old Nubian Burial-Shroud,” 68.
³⁹⁰ Ruffini, “Qasr Ibrim’s Old Nubian Burial-Shroud,” 68.
³⁹¹ Ruffini, “Qasr Ibrim’s Old Nubian Burial-Shroud,” 70.
outer garment), an omophorion (stole worn on the shoulders), and a headdress.\(^{392}\) The liturgical vestments depicted in Nubian wall paintings were fashioned of much richer and more colorful fabrics than those found in burial C. Many appear to have been made of repeat pattern silks, which were highly prized and valuable fabrics. It is possible that such rich and precious textiles, which were of even higher value than the plain silk embroidered tiraz found in the cathedral cemetery, would have been considered too costly to employ in burials. But it is also possible that an entire liturgical costume was not considered necessary in burial, and that just a single or a few garments could sufficiently express episcopal rank.

In burials from the rock tombs of the cathedral cemetery at Qasr Ibrim, several individuals were buried in accessories associated with liturgical dress. A disturbed burial has only the remains of an omphorion (QI. T/49) and a tiraz shroud (QI. T/50) in particularly soft and silky linen. The tiraz inscription is executed with silk thread in tapestry technique and renders the Arabic word for “god” (allah, ﷲ), which was used by Christians as well as Muslims. This textile encircled the head of the deceased.\(^{393}\) Tomb 3 also contained three undisturbed bodies at the bottom of the tomb.\(^{394}\) From one of these bodies came an omphorion (QI.T/47) and a piece of fabric that served either as a headscarf or enchirion (a ceremonial napkin held by bishops) (QI.T/48).\(^{395}\) The deceased also each wore a leather cross known as a schema. The excavator of the tomb noted that the bodies were clothed, but he did not describe the garments.\(^{396}\) It is likely that the clothing consisted of simple tunics and trousers, since the excavator would

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\(^{393}\) Crowfoot, Qasr Ibrim, 17.

\(^{394}\) Crowfoot, Qasr Ibrim, 19.

\(^{395}\) Crowfoot, Qasr Ibrim, 19.

\(^{396}\) Crowfoot, Qasr Ibrim, 19.
probably have noted if the deceased were dressed in more elaborate liturgical costumes. Their heads rested on high quality damask cushions likely imported from Egypt (QI.T/113) and (QI.T/114).\footnote{Crowfoot, \textit{Qasr Ibrim}, 19.} These burials provide crucial perspective on the relationship between burial dress and ecclesiastical status because the men interred are known to have served as bishops. Six stelae were found in tomb 2 of the rock cut tombs. These almost certainly originally belonged to the six rock cut tombs.\footnote{Adams, \textit{Qasr Ibrim. The Earlier Medieval Period}, 56.} The stelae are of the bishops of Qasr Ibrim, Korte, and Faras.\footnote{Plumley, “Qasr Ibrim 1966,” 11.}

Like the bishops buried in the rock cut tombs, the individual in burial 2 of the West Tower tombs wore symbols of his ecclesiastic rank. He wore a \textit{schema} (Figure 66). Innemée has written about the use and meaning of the term \textit{schema} in the Egyptian (Coptic) church, but has not discussed it in the Nubian context, probably because no extant images of \textit{schema} are visible in Nubian wall paintings. In Coptic, the term \textit{schema} can refer to this same ritual accessory, but it can also refer to the entire monastic garment.\footnote{Innemée, \textit{Ecclesiastical Dress}, 124.} This shows the important symbolic nature of the \textit{schema}, that it is so closely identified with monastic dress that it can synecdochally represent the entire monastic ritual ensemble. Innemée writes that the \textit{schema} may have originally served to hold up monastic habits while monks engaged in work, but developed to serve a symbolic function. Indeed, today, senior monks and hermits of the Coptic Church sometimes wear similar bands, called \textit{eskim}, although this practice is rare.\footnote{Innemée, \textit{Ecclesiastical Dress}, 126.} In the medieval period, the \textit{schema} was likely employed to indicate that the wearer was \textit{megaloschemos}, which is the highest spiritual stage of monasticism in Eastern Christianity. Just as \textit{tiraz} in the tomb signifies economic and political authority, the \textit{schema} indicates monastic and spiritual authority.
Indeed, the symbols of religious authority employed in burial C and other burials in the cathedral cemetery seem to have been particularly meaningful in a burial context. The *Ordo* of Gabriel V of Alexandria, patriarch of the Coptic Church (r. 1409-1427), notes that:

They make a great lamentation, as the children of Israel did over their father Jacob. They begin with prayer—the 151 psalms—if it is morning, they carry his body to the middle of the church and they wash his hands and feet and the dress him in the robes of the service, two schemata, two hoods, a white robe without embroidery [*tiraz*], and they tie a small cross in his right hand with his handkerchief.⁴⁰²

That Gabriel notes these particular vestments suggests that they had foremost meaning in burials of high-ranking church officials. Gabriel does not list these items of dress when discussing death rituals for other categories of the Coptic community, such as deacons, laypeople, monks, nuns, or children. Items such as the *schema* and handkerchief likely held particular meaning as markers of ecclesiastic authority. It is interesting to note that the *Ordo* describes the white robe that a bishop or patriarch should wear as “without *tiraz*.” The man in burial C, who wears *tiraz*, clearly does not follow Gabriel’s text. However, the very fact that Gabriel notes that the garment should *not* have *tiraz* shows that by the fifteenth century the practice was so common to require specific mention.

While the *tiraz* and schema in burial C emphasized political and ecclesiastic authority, other items of dress and textiles indicated economic status. A leather belt, unfortunately not preserved, was apparently decorated with a metal strip, of an expensive material. The innermost shroud, the one below the two *tiraz* examples, was particularly elaborate. Measuring 170 cm from selvedge to selvedge and at least 150 cm in length, it likely originally served as a furnishing

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textile and was reused as a shroud. The textile is of high-quality linen, brocaded with colorful wool and flax forming crosses, animals, and geometric motifs.\textsuperscript{403} Crowfoot notes similarities in style and iconography to textiles from Egypt and Nubia, but notes that the examples found in Nubia tend to be smaller and of lower quality.\textsuperscript{404} The presence of similar examples in each territory, and their close economic ties, suggests that the shroud could have been made in either region. However, the presence of crosses indicates that it was made for a Christian market. The rugs on which the body lay were impressive. Though now fragmentary, scholars have determined that two rugs originally lined the tomb, one in Turkish (Ghiordes) knot (QI.T/28), the other in Spanish knot (QI.T/29).\textsuperscript{405} The former example is very poorly preserved. The pattern may be asymmetrical and non-repeating, perhaps evocative of an example from Fustat.\textsuperscript{406} The latter example has a border of rosettes and stylized rooster motifs that Donald King believes are of Islamic origin.\textsuperscript{407} Both rugs appear to have been placed in the tomb in secondary use. While most Egyptian \textit{tiraz} likely arrived in Makuria through the \textit{baqt}, the non-\textit{tiraz} textiles in burial C, while likely very valuable, may have been sold on the open market. Whether produced in Egypt or Nubia, these textiles may have been traded between the two territories and used in each region by customers who shared similar international styles. These valuable textiles may have been saved and reused in the burial of a noted ecclesiastic in order to emphasize the economic authority of the deceased, his church, and his community, who could afford to purchase such objects.

\textsuperscript{403} Crowfoot, \textit{Qasr Ibrim}, 12.
\textsuperscript{404} Crowfoot, \textit{Qasr Ibrim}, 12.
\textsuperscript{405} Crowfoot, \textit{Qasr Ibrim}, 13.
\textsuperscript{406} Crowfoot, \textit{Qasr Ibrim}, 38.
\textsuperscript{407} Crowfoot, \textit{Qasr Ibrim}, 37.
The body in burial C was wrapped in three coverlets, each four meters in length, that were folded over the head. These fabrics were then sewn up the sides. Each of the coverlets had a selvedge strip cut off, and it is believed that these tapes (one of which could have been Q.L.T/158) served to bind the shroud. Archaeologists of medieval burials call this type of shrouding (wherein the body is wrapped in one of more large cloths that are secured with bands, strings, or twining) “parceling.” Strong evidence for parceling exists throughout the medieval Christian world wherever textiles have remained. Bodies in Britain were wrapped in sheets then secured with twining.⁴⁰⁸ A body from Amorium, in west-central modern-day Turkey, was buried in a single shroud, that was, according to Sophie Violet Moore, tied shut with “a single length of plaited cord, stretched around the back and over the stomach, then passed behind the thighs and tied in a knot above the knees.”⁴⁰⁹ Parceling ensured that the body remained in a supine position in the grave. Parceling contrasts with other forms of shrouding, including securing shrouds with pins, wrapping the body with a single ribbon-like cloth (i.e., “mummy” style), or not using shrouds at all. Islamic burials in Egypt covered in shrouds did not employ the parceling technique. The shrouds depicted in the Maqamat are knotted at the top of the head, and, to my knowledge, the body at Istabl Antar has no evidence of anything binding the shroud (see Figure 53).

Parceling was particularly prevalent in Christian burials in the Nile Valley. As noted above, late antique and early medieval Christian burials, including at Fag al-Gamus, Matmar, Mostregadda, the Monastery of Epiphanius, and Qarara, include bodies shrouded and wrapped

with κειρία (slim red, white, or brown ribbons). These tapes were likely purpose-woven for use in burials and were typically wrapped in a lattice pattern over the body. Kristen South believes this method of wrapping bodies was so prevalent in early Christian graves that it may be seen as an indicator of Christian identity when the identity of the deceased is otherwise unknown. In the cathedral cemetery at Qasr Ibrim, a burial probably from the sixth century was shrouded in a manner almost identical to burials in Egypt. Purpose-woven tapes 10.30 and 11.29 m in length were secured over the body.\textsuperscript{410} Evidence from Qasr Ibrim suggests that the tradition of parceling continued into the medieval era. Burials A and B in the West Tower tombs, which shared a tomb with burial C (but which may have been later additions) were described by the excavator as being “bound with wool cords” and “fastened with woolen cords,” respectively.\textsuperscript{411} Additionally, several burials from the rock-cut tombs were shrouded in such a way to suggest that they also were bound with tapes in lattice patterns.

In her publication of textiles from the cathedral cemetery, Crowfoot writes that the extant bindings from burial C are too short to have created a lattice or box pattern, but evidence from burials from other sites in Nubia demonstrates that shorter strips and strips torn from other textiles, rather than purpose-woven tapes, could serve the same purpose. In Christian burials from Qustul, bodies were shrouded, then tied in a lattice pattern with ribbons made from “fragments torn from sheets.”\textsuperscript{412} Burials could also be tied with bands in patterns other than lattice. A burial from a cemetery in Serra East has shrouds fastened with a single band tied lengthwise from head to feet, and then at least thirteen tapes that were tied across the body

\textsuperscript{410} Crowfoot, \textit{Qasr Ibrim}, 21.
\textsuperscript{411} Crowfoot, \textit{Qasr Ibrim}, 10-11. Crowfoot notes that the cords were made of Nubian cotton.
\textsuperscript{412} Christa C. Mayer Thurman and Bruce Williams, \textit{Ancient Textiles from Nubia: Meroitic, X-Group, and Christian Fabrics from Ballana to Qustul} (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1979), 41.
According to the excavator, the bands were twisted or knotted where they crossed. It is unclear whether the horizontal bands crossed each other, or just crossed the vertical band.

Structurally, the parceling had the effect of keeping the body in a supine position in the grave. Visually, the practice had the effect of creating a pattern made of intersecting tapes or strings, that may have been significant to Christians in the Nile Valley. Paintings of Christ’s shrouded bodies from the Nile Valley, including an eighth-century wall painting at Faras in Nubia (Figure 67) and a thirteenth-century icon currently in the Coptic Museum, Cairo (see Figure 34a), depict the body shrouded, swathed in a large sheet that is fastened in a lattice pattern. Images associated with other Christian sects depict similar shrouds. A thirteenth-century Byzantine image of the Marys at the tomb depicts Christ swathed in a broad cloth that is secured with latticed bands (Figure 68). Christ’s head remains uncovered. Later images of the entombment in the Ethiopian tradition depict similar shrouds. A fourteenth-century manuscript illumination from the Kebran Church near Lake Tana, Ethiopia, depicts Christ’s body entirely enshrouded in white, with stripes of orange forming lattices and crosses (Figure 69). It is possible that shrouds bound with bands tied in a pattern may have been considered a Christian tradition in the Nile Valley. This does not mean that all Christian corpses would be shrouded that way, or that non-Christian bodies could not be wrapped in fabric strips, but it may have been a

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common choice to depict the body of Christ that way in art and follow that tradition in Christian burials.

In any case, the manner in which the man interred in burial C was shrouded would have been a specialized process requiring time and effort. In her work on Byzantine burials, Sophie Moore argues that “it is plausible that the privacy and intimacy of the act of slowly concealing the body was a means of gaining control of the emotions experienced by the people enacting the shrouding.”

Certainly, in the Coptic tradition, shrouding in a monastic setting was a social action. The History of Patriarchs of the Alexandria, a historiographical text originally compiled by Bishop Severus Ibn al-Muqaffa’ (d. 987) and consistently updated after his death, most often follows descriptions of ecclesiastics’ deaths by mentioning their bodies being shrouded, an action that is invariably performed by their community. For example, at the death of Mark II (819) his community “gathered around his body, and read the appointed office over him, and enshrouded him, and laid him in a wooden coffin.”

These actions—performing prayers beside the body, shrouding it, and placing it in a coffin—were the most significant aspects of the post-death custom for an ecclesiastic. In the above quotation, the subject is the third person plural (“they”). The text therefore highlights that the community performed these actions. The importance of the community to burial practice is made clear by canon law. The apologist and theologian Ibn al-’Assal, al-Safi (c. 1205-1265) writes that when an archpriest or archdeacon dies, “all of the flock shall be present at their funerals, because they were called the fathers of

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An image in the Monastery of Makarius in Wadi Natrun further emphasizes the importance of this communal ritual (Figure 70). Nicodemus and Joseph wrap the body of Christ in a large textile. Their hunched postures and solemn gazes suggest the gravity of their task. The image is in one of several roundels decorating an archway leading to the Sanctuary of St. Benjamin. The central placement of the image just outside the space where the Eucharist is celebrated in a monastic setting emphasizes the importance of the communal aspects of shrouding.

Returning to burial C, we see that the funerary ensemble of the man buried there emphasized several elements of his identity. By wearing tiraz textiles, he or his community emphasized his political connectedness. The garments, which were likely obtained through a close connection with the Makurian king, expressed Nubian political power and esteem. By wearing these textiles, the deceased ecclesiastic emphasized his own high status in the political realm, his connection to a sovereign of an important nation. The non-tiraz textiles, including the intricate rug, attested to the ecclesiastic’s affluence, his ability to afford luxury goods. The schema, on the other hand, demonstrated the deceased man’s religious and monastic authority, his prestigious rank as megaloschèmos. Finally, the manner in which he was shrouded, wrapped in bands that likely formed a pattern over the coverlet, suggest a choice to continue a longstanding Christian tradition, performed by ancestors and depicted in images of Christ. The complex process of shrouding emphasized communal involvement in his burial process. In sum, the components of his ensemble emphasized political, economic, and ecclesiastic authority, as well as reverence within his community. Their use together suggests an amalgam of these

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418 The canons were originally composed in Arabic and later translated to Ge’ez, where they took on importance in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Abba Paulos Tzadua, trans., The Fetha Nagast: The Law of Kings, ed., Peter L. Strauss (Addis Ababa: Faculty of Law, Haile Sellassie I University, 1968), 123.
categories of prestige. This means that each indicator of authority was not limited to its individual meaning, but that these items worked together to demonstrate authority and prestige.

**Conclusion**

By comparing the *tiraz* in Istabl Antar and Qasr Ibrim, we see that similar textiles served different and yet interrelated meanings in each context. Throughout the Nile Valley—and throughout Afro-Eurasia—*tiraz* signaled economic and political authority. But in particular contexts, users ascribed to the textiles other meanings as well. For the Muslim man buried in Istabl Antar, the *tiraz* signaled his political participation in the Fatimid regime, as well as his adherence to the strictures related to death and burial indicated in the *hadith*. The use of a Fatimid shroud with a Shi’i inscription emphasized his Shi’i faith, whereas the shroud dated to 932, prior to the Fatimid conquest of Egypt, demonstrated either the history of Fatimid power in Ifriqiyya or Fatimid domination over their Sunni Abbasid predecessors in Egypt. The community of the Christian ecclesiastic in burial C at Qasr Ibrim, on the other hand, translated the meanings of *tiraz* in Islamic religious and political contexts such as at Istabl Antar in order to fit their Nubian Christian context. In this burial, the *tiraz* maintained its symbolism as a marker of political power and prestige. The prestige of the deceased ecclesiastic in various realms, however, was emphasized by the inclusion of symbols of religious and economic status. Indeed, one difference in the ways in which the *tiraz* was used in each burial appears to be the relationship to personal versus collective identity. The prestige in the Istabl Antar burial seems directed toward the regime, the power of the Fatimids, and the deceased’s membership in that
elite social echelon. In opposition, the objects in the Qasr Ibrim burial denote the deceased himself as having high status, within networks and hierarchies of social power and authority.
CHAPTER IV

Wrapped in Community and Tradition: Textiles with Christian Inscriptions in Medieval Egypt

A fragmentary cloth in the Benaki Museum (Athens) presents a type of textile familiar to historians of medieval Egypt (Figure 71). Fine wool threads in their natural un-dyed color form a diaphanous cloth. A band of purple and wisps of twisted fringe mark the edge. Twenty centimeters below the colored band, a line of embroidered script spans the textile. Under the inscription runs a row of crosses. From the layout, style, size, and color scheme, it is clear that the object belongs to the larger group of textiles known as *tiraz*, cloths traditionally gifted by the Islamic caliph in recognition of political support. Extant examples mostly date from the ninth to twelfth centuries.

*Tiraz* inscriptions found on textiles from the medieval Islamic world are usually rendered in Arabic. The desirability of *tiraz* textiles led to the proliferation of workshops that catered to

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420 I base this date on the catalog compiled by Jochen Sokoly, which includes approximately 80% of the extant *tiraz* corpus. Jochen Sokoly, “*Tiraz* Textiles from Egypt: Production, Administration and Uses of *Tiraz* Textiles from Egypt under the Umayyad, 'Abbasid and Fatimid Dynasties” (DPhil Diss., Oxford University, 2001), 23.

421 The bibliography on *tiraz* is large. For a recent comprehensive overview, see Louise Mackie, *Symbols of Power: Luxury Textiles from Islamic Lands, 7th-21st Century* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2015), 82-128.
people outside the caliph’s inner circle. These *tiraz al-amma* (public workshops) wove textiles that employed the same visual, material, and inscriptional features as textiles from the *tiraz al-khassa* (private workshops that produced textiles for the court). The “public” workshops were, however, regulated by the state. Sokoly has shown that the state controlled all *tiraz* workshops. The caliph directly controlled production in the *tiraz al-khassa*, whereas the larger state governmental administration oversaw the *tiraz al-amma*. Jochen Sokoly, “Towards a Model of Early Islamic Textile Institutions in Egypt,” in *Islamische Textilkunst des Mittelalters: Aktuelle Probleme*, ed. Karel Otavsky (Riggisberg, Switzerland: Abegg-Stiftung, 1997), 119-20. Mackie, *Symbols of Power*, 86.

Scholars today see *tiraz* textiles from both the caliphal and public workshops, as well as those from unidentified workshops, as part of the same tradition, and they have suggested that both caliphal and imitation *tiraz* textiles held important social and political meanings. Sokoly, “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,” 9.

Yet the Benaki textile departs from typical examples of Egyptian *tiraz* in that the inscription is in Coptic, the liturgical language of medieval Egypt’s Christian minority population.

In this chapter, I show that the Benaki and similar textiles translate *tiraz* not only in the language of its inscription—from Arabic to Coptic—but also in the social functions of *tiraz*. On translation as an interpretive method, see Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), esp. 1-14, and the introduction to this dissertation.

Many of these textiles show evidence that they were worn in both life, as objects of dress, and in death, repurposed as burial shrouds. I argue that these textiles held distinct meaning in each context, related to uniquely Christian conceptions of life and death.

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425 Irene Bierman refers to such aspects of writing as the “territorial function” (the aspects of script that define group identity), the “referential function” (the context of the text), and the “aesthetic function” (the style). See Irene A. Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 16-20, and the introduction to this dissertation.
The Benaki textile is not the only extant example of a medieval Egyptian textile that follows the size, layout, and color scheme of Arabic tiraz but employs Coptic script (or in other instances Greek script).\textsuperscript{426} Scholars have identified at least three-dozen examples in collections throughout the world.\textsuperscript{427} However, the corpus remains largely unpublished and un-photographed, and therefore is little known. Moreover, while the majority of examples of Arabic tiraz have been translated, many Coptic and Greek inscriptions on tiraz have not been translated. Most work on Christian tiraz is in the form of short entries in collection catalogs. Since few collections hold more than a single example, few comprehensive studies have been attempted.\textsuperscript{428} Furthermore, medieval Egyptian textiles with Coptic inscriptions have been omitted from major studies of tiraz, which focus on textiles with historical and protocollary inscriptions, which most Coptic and Greek inscriptions lack.\textsuperscript{429} In these respects, the following discussion expands our understanding of medieval tiraz.

In this chapter, I refer to tiraz textiles with Coptic and/or Greek inscriptions as “Christian tiraz” because they were exclusively used by Christian wearers. However, Egyptian Christians, as discussed in the prior chapter, often wore tiraz textiles with Arabic inscriptions, including in

\textsuperscript{426} Like Coptic, Greek was employed in the Egyptian Christian liturgy. On the relationship between Greek and Coptic on tiraz textiles, see Jacques van der Vliet, “In a Robe of Gold, Status, Magic, and Politics on Inscribed Christian Textiles from Egypt,” in \textit{Textile Messages: Inscribed Fabrics from Roman to Abbasid Égypt}, eds. Cäcilia Fluck and Gisela Helmecke (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 35.


\textsuperscript{428} See n9, above for important exceptions.

\textsuperscript{429} For example, Ernst Kühnel (with technical analysis by Louisa Bellinger), \textit{Catalog of Dated Tiraz Fabrics: Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid} (Washington, D.C.: Textile Museum, 1952); Sokoly, “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt.”
(Christian) religious settings. Because Arabic was the colloquial language of medieval Egyptian Christians – and had even emerged as a theological and devotional language – the presence of Arabic alone does not indicate the Islamic identity of an object or the person who owned and used it. When employed in Christian contexts, Arabic tiraz textiles were just as “Christian” as examples inscribed with Coptic and/or Greek.

While the exact date of the Benaki textile is unknown, the tiraz institution of which it is a part belonged to Egypt’s medieval period. The few Christian tiraz textiles that have undergone C-14 dating have yielded dates overlapping with Egypt’s Fatimid period (969-1171). For example, a textile in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York dates to 810-1010 and one in the Katoen Natie Collection in Antwerp dates to 1029-1219. Further research is required to amass C-14 data on a larger sample of Christian tiraz and to clarify a more precise dating scheme for the corpus as a whole. Based on the Sahidic-Fayumic dialect of many of the Coptic inscriptions, it appears that the textiles were produced in the Fayum, a region in Middle Egypt.

Jacques Van der Vliet has shown that inscriptions on tiraz textiles that employ Coptic and/or Greek script fall into two types: quotations from the psalms and apotropaic inscriptions that are in the form of petitionary prayers. Some textiles have both types of inscriptions. My research shows that overall, the textiles largely fall into three visual and technical categories,

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431 For the Metropolitan Museum of Art textile see Fluck, “Inscribed Textiles,” 183-84 (cat. no. 124 B). For the Katoen Natie textile, see Antoine de Moor, Chris Verhecken-Lammens, and Mark Van Strydonck, “Relevance and Irrelevance of Radiocarbon Dating of Inscribed Textiles,” in Textile Messages: Inscribed Fabrics from Roman to Abbasid Egypt, eds. Cácilia Fluck and Gisela Helmecke (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 226. These dates are noted by Fluck, “Inscribed Textiles,” 183-84.

which do not correspond to inscription types. The first, exemplified by the Benaki textile, has boxy lettered inscriptions across undyed tabby weave (a simple weave with one warp thread for one weft thread) wool, with little other decoration. A second, rarer group of textiles has inscriptions of similar style, but on a background of diaper-patterned silk brocade. This type can be seen in an example in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London (Figure 72). In contrast, the third type, seen in the forementioned textile in the Katoen Natie Collection, is on a purple background of weft-faced tabby weave wool (Figure 73). The Coptic script, usually in white thread, is in the same boxy style. Also, these textiles often have an inscription in highly stylized Arabic accompanying the Coptic script. These textiles are associated with production in Tutun, in the Fayum region of Middle Egypt. In this chapter, I offer new possibilities for understanding Christian *tiraz*, using the three aforementioned textiles as representative examples, to show how these textiles translated the social values that conventional Arabic-language *tiraz* signified.433

The Coptic Language

While Coptic was traditionally both the spoken and liturgical language of the Christians of Egypt, by the year 1000 Arabic had increasingly become the language of everyday life, while Coptic persisted in liturgical use.434 Swanson notes that by the twelfth century, many Christians could not comprehend the Coptic texts recited in church services.435 Already in the late eleventh century, theologians had begun to produce religious texts, including theological treatises, records of canon law, and histories of the Church in Arabic, likely in order to engage an Arabic-speaking

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433 It is important to note that Christian *tiraz* textiles were rare. As discussed in Chapter Three, Egyptian Christians more commonly used *tiraz* with Arabic inscriptions.
434 Van der Vliet, “In a Robe of Gold,” 32.
By the thirteenth century, Christian theological writing in Arabic flourished, and scholars refer to this period as a “renaissance.” Therefore tiraz textiles with Coptic inscriptions were made and used in periods when the language held various meanings: 1) when Coptic was increasingly losing its status as the language of everyday life for Egypt’s Christian population, but remained symbolic of communal identity; 2) when it was solely a religious language; and finally, 3) when both Coptic and Arabic were used in religious settings, but only Coptic called to mind the ancient liturgy and history of Christians in Egypt.

Functions for the Living

The Katoen Natie textile is complete, which is extraordinarily rare for medieval Coptic textiles (Figure 73). It forms a 220 x 100 cm rectangle, with fringe at both ends of the warps. Parallel decoration lines each of the short ends, followed by the Coptic inscription, and a line of pseudo-Arabic script. It is thought to have functioned as a shawl. The Benaki example, on the other hand, is only partially preserved (see Figure 71). It is almost certain that its original format was similar to the Katoen Natie textile, with parallel decoration, fringe, and lines of script on both ends. In a catalog entry for the Benaki textile, Cäcilia Fluck identifies the piece as a shawl.

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439 Fluck, “Inscribed Textiles,” 183 (cat. no. 124 A).
Fluck’s identification follows Lisa Golombek and Veronika Gervers’s criteria for categorizing the function of *tiraz*: both the Benaki and Katoen Natie garments preserve selvedges on both sides and their inscriptions run parallel to the fringed end.⁴⁴⁰ The widths of the Katoen Natie (100 cm) and Benaki (72 cm) textiles are comparable to examples Golombek and Gervers believe were shawls. The wearer of these textiles presumably wrapped the garment around their shoulders, perhaps as seen in an illustration from the *Maqamat of al-Hariri* (Figure 74), where *tiraz* bands drape the figures’ shoulders.⁴⁴¹

While shawls are a common functional type for both Coptic and Arabic *tiraz*, they were not the only textile types to be inscribed with *tiraz*. The Victoria & Albert textile is one such example (see Figure 72). While it is very fragmentary, measuring just 6.2 x 2.85 cm, a selvedge on one side, and cord on another provides clues as to its original use. The warp ends form an S-twisted cord rather than fringe, which rules out the traditional presentation of shawls. Because the two perpendicular edges are a selvedge and a cord, they must have formed the corner of the textile. The textile’s original function is suggested by three fragments (likely from two original textiles) in the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan (Figure 75), which mirror the Victoria & Albert example in style, material, technique, and inscription type. The fragments are very large, measuring, 150 cm from intact selvedge to selvedge. Their colossal size and rectangular shape suggest they were not garments but instead served as coverlets or hangings. The fine quality of the weave makes a designation of coverlet more likely; hangings tend to be characterized by coarser weaves.

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Tiraz could also serve as presentation towels, sashes, napkins, and turbans. A Coptic-inscribed textile in the Louvre (that has been Carbon-14 dated to 777-969) served as a tunic and was found with a matching hood (Figure 76). The inscriptions run across the ends of the sleeves. The inscription on the left sleeve reads, “[In] the name of God. First of all…” The one on the right reads, “God help Father Kolthi of the Monastery Nekloni (Naqlun). Amen.” The presence of the coordinating hood and the inscription mentioning a priest suggest that the tunic was a part of a monastic costume, though the tunic was not necessarily of expressly liturgical use.

Christian tiraz could also be employed in non-liturgical settings. Another inscribed tunic, now in the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst in Berlin, is a sleeve of what was likely an everyday tunic (Figure 77). The inscription reads, “God, the Logos, protect our beloved Damian, Amen.” Both the Louvre and Berlin sleeves are similar in form, with inscriptions in the same general location. It is worth noting that there are not noticeable differences between liturgical

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444 $\text{ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲡⲱⲓⲫⲓ ωⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⛩ⲡⲣⲁⲛ ωⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⛩ⲱⲃ ...van der Vliet, “A Naqlun Monk Brought Home,” 242.
tunics and secular examples in their appearances or the terms used to refer to them. The Coptic language uses the same word, ϣⲁⲡⲧ (tunic), to refer to both secular and liturgical tunics.

Close study of Arabic-language tiraz can also elucidate the functions of Christian tiraz because the textiles were used in similar ways. The example to receive the closest study is the so-called Veil of St. Anne, a complete, well-preserved textile dated to 1096-1097. The veil was produced in the tiraz workshop of Damietta (in the Nile Delta, north-eastern Egypt), but brought to the Cathedral of St. Anne in Apt, France, during the First Crusade (1095-1099), where it was stored in a glass jar and venerated as a relic. While the rectangular shape and fringed edges suggest that the textile may originally have served as a shawl like the examples discussed above, Gaston Wiet and Georges Marçais hypothesize that it may have formed the back of an abaya (a sleeveless coat). The end of the textile would have been looped around and sewn, forming two holes for arms. Sokoly’s close study of the garment, however, discerned no extant sewing marks or arm holes. The textile may have instead served as a shawl or a turban. It is also possible that it was originally woven with the intent of it becoming an abaya, but was never completed, perhaps because it was brought to the West, where it served as a relic. The debate over the original function of the Veil of Saint Anne elucidates an important point: textiles could serve different, even multiple functions in primary and secondary use.

Functions for the Dead

449 Sokoly, “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,” 75-76.
450 Sokoly, “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,” 76.
Features of each of the three textiles on which this chapter focuses suggest that these textiles each served as burial shrouds in their final use. Extant medieval Egyptian textiles have usually survived in one of two contexts: inhumations or rubbish heaps. In both contexts, textiles are buried in the ground, preserved in Egypt’s dry climate. While the passage of time has fragmented many burial textiles, they were once complete garments, coverlets, and pillows when deposited in the ground. Textiles from rubbish heaps, on the other hand, were usually fragmentary rags when thrown away. Textiles were expensive and were repurposed until unusable. It is therefore likely that textiles of a large size, like the Katoen Natie and Benaki textiles, were used in burial settings.

Another way to distinguish burial textiles employed in inhumations is from their physical condition. Because the people of medieval Egypt practiced inhumation rather than cremation, burial textiles were necessarily close to decaying bodies. The brown stains of bodily decay attest to the final use of such textiles, including the Benaki and Victoria & Albert Museum textile (the dark color of the Katoen Natie textile precludes the identification of staining from bodily decay with the naked eye). In some cases, these stains can even point to the way the textiles were wrapped around corpses. An Arabic *tiraz* textile from the Detroit Institute of Arts Museum has a pattern of stains that is very close to that on the Benaki textiles, but even more visible (Figure 78). On this example, the marks indicate that the shroud was wrapped around the head of the deceased. The stains undulate, indicating that the textile was wrapped, with unstained spaces of around 7-10 cm, where the textile was over the face. Bodily fluids seep downwards, and the average adult head is 20-23 cm in circumference, so stains on the textile are from the back portion of the head. Scholars have noted this practice in Islamic burials of the same period, such as a burial of a Muslim from Khadra Sharifa, Fustat, where the script of *tiraz* textiles was placed
Excavators found textiles wrapped around the head of the deceased in Christian burials in Qasr Ibrim and Naqlun. The stain pattern on the Benaki textile is visible on hundreds of Arabic *tiraz*, suggesting that wrapping *tiraz* textiles around deceased bodies’ heads, particularly with the inscription over the eyes, was common in medieval Egyptian burials.

In her study of burial textiles from the tenth to thirteenth century cemetery at Naqlun, Barbara Czaja-Szewczak showed that the tunics found in the cemetery fall into two types: those worn in life and repurposed in burials, and those created expressly for use as funerary garments. Both types are characterized by *tiraz*. The first type can be identified by evidence of wear and reuse, such as patching and darning. The second type, those expressly produced for use in burial, can be identified by their large and simple shape, material of unspun linen, and/or unfinished character. Details indicating that a tunic was produced expressly for burial might include unfinished neck openings and bottom hems and the use basting stitches, which would have torn or fallen out if the garment had been worn in life. In some cases, the tunics were coated with a substance that gave them a waxy feel, a treatment that could be used on coverlets and coffin covers as well.

An example of a tunic expressly made for burial comes from tomb 232 at Naqlun (Nd. 02.327). This bag-shaped tunic was basted together in running-stitch (a type of basic embroidery stitch). The sides were likewise basted together, leaving openings for the arms. The tunic was decorated with two patches of waxed linen, each with bands of decoration that, while, decayed,

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seems to have imitated *tiraz* in format and composition.\(^{455}\) Though the burial tunics were meant to be worn to the grave, care was still invested in their decoration. Nd. 02.327 was an inner tunic; the individual buried in the tomb 232 also wore an outer tunic decorated with a band of birds and trees in the *tiraz* fashion (Nd.02.264).\(^{456}\) Unfortunately this tunic is too fragmentary to estimate its original dimensions and speculate about whether it was fashioned as a burial tunic. However, evidence from other burials shows that burial tunics were usually the outer garment. The deceased could be unclothed under their purpose-made burial tunic, or they could wear the clothing of daily life as under garments.\(^{457}\) Not every corpse, however, was clothed in a burial tunic. Some people were buried in everyday clothing.\(^{458}\)

Using similar methods of close analysis, Julia Galliker, Ines Borgensfelder, and Helga Rösel-Mautendorfer have shown that many examples of Christian *tiraz* were not worn in life and were only used in burials.\(^{459}\) They show that the burial textiles had a particularly diaphanous, open-weave structure that would have snagged or pulled when worn in life for even a single use. Yet of forty-five examples they inspected, all but one had no evidence of wear or repair, even under a microscope. Like the burial tunics from Naqlun, these textiles could not have been worn in life and retained their pristine condition. It is possible to identify other examples of Christian *tiraz* as having been purpose-made for burial. The Louvre tunic with matching hood embroidered with the name of Father Kolthi (see Figure 76) is decorated with supplementary wefts that float unattached on the back of the garment for almost 10 cm. Decoration with this technique would


\(^{457}\) Czaja-Szewczak, “Funerary textiles from the medieval cemetery of Naqlun,” 419.


no doubt have been pulled and snagged if worn in life, yet the floating wefts of the Louvre tunic are pristine. The tunic then, must have been worn only in the grave, and was likely woven for that purpose.

**Script**

Whether worn in life or death, the content of the inscription and the decorative details of the Christian *tiraz* emphasize the Christian identity of the wearer through the content of the inscription, the use of Coptic script, and the decorative scheme. In Christian *tiraz*, the form and composition of Islamic *tiraz* was adapted to express Christian identity.

In written forms of the Coptic language, there is no calligraphic system of the sort that exists in Arabic. But some Coptic inscriptions do emulate the form of Arabic, for example, two monumental inscriptions of the thirteenth century: the first, of psalm 121, in the sanctuary of St. Teckla in the al-Mu’allqa Church, Cairo (see Figure 13); the second, of psalm 86, positioned over an archway in the Monastery of St. Antony, near the Red Sea (Figure 79). Both inscriptions have slender, rounded, calligraphic letters and curved decorative motifs that recall both the diacritical marks and decorative motifs on Arabic inscriptions of the same period, such as that on the façade of the Qalawun mosque complex in Cairo, which was built in the 1280s. The St. Antony inscription is located very close to two Arabic inscriptions in *naskhi*

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script, which are also quotations from the psalms, and it mirrors those inscriptions stylistically (Figure 80).\textsuperscript{463}

Elizabeth S. Bolman and William Lyster have shown that the area of the church of St. Antony where the painted inscriptions are located evoked palatial designs, suggesting political power and artistic refinement.\textsuperscript{464} The use of Arabizing Coptic script recalled Arabic inscriptions that were common on contemporaneous public buildings of Islamic affiliation and suggested inter-sectarian concepts of social prestige, power, and artistic achievement.

In contrast, the inscriptions on Christian \textit{tiraz} display a different type of script. They are woven in a boxy style with squared corners and clear separations between letters.\textsuperscript{465} It was presumably within the weaver’s skill to have rendered a more calligraphic version of Coptic script.\textsuperscript{466} Arabic \textit{tiraz}, whether in \textit{kufic} or \textit{naskhi} lettering, employs fully calligraphic scripts, as seen in a tenth-century \textit{kufic} example and an eleventh to twelfth century \textit{naskhi} example, both in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (Figures 81 and 82).\textsuperscript{467} Instead the weavers of Christian \textit{tiraz} chose to emphasize the distinctive characteristics of Coptic script, including the spaces between letters, the relative infrequency and simplicity of diacritical marks, and the lack of a calligraphic tradition. In the emphasis on the differences between Coptic and Arabic script, the

\textsuperscript{463} Bolman and Lyster, “The Khurus Vault,” 150.
\textsuperscript{465} The only variation on this script of which I am aware is found on P. Vindob. Stoff 248 in the collection of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, which uses the same type of letter forms, but with slight flourishes. On this textile, see Galliker Borgensfelder, and Rösel-Mautendorfer, “Interdisciplinary Methods and New Perspectives on Inscribed Textiles: A Case Study of Christian ‘Tiraz’,” forthcoming.
\textsuperscript{466} Indeed, Durand has shown that in the sixth and seventh centuries, immediately following the Arab conquest, Coptic and Greek inscriptions on textiles became more decorative, forming a script “à mi-chemin entre l’épigraphie et la pseudo-épigraphie.” Maximilien Durand, “Vers Une Pseudo-Épigraphie Textile en Langue Copte: Diogène, Panopé, Thétis,” in \textit{Textile Messages: Inscribed Fabrics from Roman to Abbasid Egypt}, eds. Cäcilia Fluck and Gisela Helmecke (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 87.
Christian *tiraz* emphasize the “territorial function” of the text, the ability of the script to define community and exclude outsiders.\(^{468}\)

The contrast between Coptic and Arabic script is particularly strong in a group of textiles produced in the Fayum, attributed by Maximilien Duran and Simon Rettig to a workshop in Tutun (also known as Tebtunis).\(^{469}\) These textiles, of which the Katoen Natie textile (see Figure 73) is an example, are bilingual, including both Arabic (or pseudo-Arabic) and Coptic inscriptions, each communicating different content. The Arabic script is of a particularly ornate calligraphic form, a type of *kufic* with triangular letter heads that look like small trees (Figure 83).\(^{470}\) Many examples include figural imagery within the inscription. For example, a textile in the Kelsey Museum has small birds between the letters. The presence of the birds enhances the pictorial effect of the letters, eliding image and text (Figure 84). Motifs of trees and birds were common in decorative bands on *tiraz* textiles with *kufic* or *naski* inscriptions, running in lines parallel line with the inscriptions (e.g., Figure 85). While Arabic calligraphy commonly served as a decorative device on textiles and in other media, the Tutun examples go a step further, blending text into figurative image. The inclusion of purely decorative bands with ornaments that mirror the style and content of the picture-script further compounds the effect (Figure 86). The extremely pictorial Arabic diverges sharply from the boxy and simple Coptic, creating a sense of contrast that amplifies the unique letterforms of the Coptic.

\(^{468}\) Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 16-20.


\(^{470}\) Kühnel, *Catalog of Dated Tiraz Fabrics*, 84. Durand and Rettig note that while the earliest datable Arabic inscriptions known from the Fayum are in a simple *kufic*, examples of the eighth to ninth century are floriated. The *kufic* used on the bilingual textiles seems to have developed from the earlier embellished forms. Maximilien Durand and Simon Rettig, “Un Atelier,” 168. Also see Helmecke, “Tiraz Textiles,” in *Egypt: Faith after the Pharaohs*, eds. Cäcilia Fluck, Gisela Helmecke, and Elisabeth R. O’Connell (London: British Museum Press, 2015), 222.
It is important to note that the Arabic letterforms employed on the bilingual textiles are different from examples on other objects. The script does not seem to have been used on extant textiles from other regions. Moreover, I am not aware of Arabic inscriptions in other media, from the Fayum and elsewhere, that take this form. Arabic inscriptions from now-lost wall paintings in a structure tentatively identified as a church in Tutun do not employ the same type of Arabic script as the bilingual textiles. According to C.C. Walters, they are instead characteristic of kufic of the period 950-1050 (Figure 87). These inscriptions are actually meant to depict tiraz, but not bilingual tiraz. As such, they mirror the epigraphy of extant monolingual Arabic tiraz.

Motifs

In their visual elements, Christian tiraz both imitated and emphatically diverged from Arabic tiraz. The difference in language is of course one difference, but the iconography and style of Christian tiraz portray differences too. The Benaki textile (see Figure 71), for example, along with dozens of other examples of Christian tiraz, can be further differentiated from Arabic tiraz by the presence of crosses, a sign of Christian identity. Scholars have shown that Egyptian Christians rarely emphasized their religious identity on textiles. Christian tiraz, however, are a notable exception, and examples of all types commonly incorporate crosses.

Crosses also appear frequently in other media of medieval Egyptian Christian art, such as in the tenth- and thirteenth-century wall painting program in the nave of the Red Monastery.

473 Examples with crosses include Katoen Natie no. 143, published in Marie-Cecile Bruwier, ed., Égyptiennes: étoffes Coptes du Nil (Morlanweiz: Musée royal de Mariemont, 1997), 223-225 (cat. no. 108); and Kelsey Museum of Archaeology no. 02.9155, unpublished (see Figure 75).
Church in Sohag, Upper Egypt (Figure 88). It is formed of painted crosses in vivid red, blue, and yellow on bare walls. While the program differs from the Benaki textile in its variety of cross-types and the details of its iconography (which is more complex than the woven examples), the overall effect of crosses encircling the community as they assembled during the liturgy recalls how the crosses on the Benaki textile, and other Christian tiraz examples, encircled the shoulders and, in death, the face of the wearer.

In her discussion of the Red Monastery program, Bolman provides insight into the potential meanings of crosses in medieval Egypt. She notes that because the program includes only cross motifs, which are aniconic but emphatically Christian, it assimilates with the aniconic character of Islamic sacred art, but simultaneously distinguishes itself from Islamic models through the Christian nature of the symbol. Thus the wearer of this textile emphasized both participation in the visual trends of dominant Egyptian society and his Christian identity, prominently displayed on his person to everyone he passed.

Bolman also notes that crosses could hold soteriological connotations, which would have been especially appropriate in a burial context. For example, an inscription identifies a thirteenth-century painted cross in the Monastery of St. Antony as the tree of life (Figure 89). There is no reason to assume that the crosses on the Benaki textile and other Christian tiraz were understood as trees of life. Nonetheless, the textile’s final wearer or the members of his

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474 On this monument, see Elizabeth S. Bolman, ed., The Red Monastery Church: Beauty and Asceticism in Upper Egypt (New Haven: Yale University Press/American Research Center in Egypt, 2016).
community responsible for his interment chose to bind his eyes, envelop his face, and cushion his skull in this polysemic motif for his journey in the afterlife. The cross served as a marker of his Christian faith and community, the apparatus on which Christ died, making possible eternal salvation.

The visual aspects of the Katoen Natie textile (see Figure 73), with its purple background and brightly colored stylized iconography, are also meaningful. Textiles of this style, which are associated with Tutun in the Fayum, have been dated to the Tulunid period (868-905), but based on a dubious argument. More reliable are stylistic links to early textiles, including textiles ascribed to pre-Islamic Egypt (i.e., before ca. 640). As discussed above, many of the textiles associated with Tutun are bilingual, and the Arabic script employed is so highly stylized that the pictorial features dominate the phonetic ones. In this way, the text morphs into image. Indeed, the use of figural imagery, while not present on all examples, appears to be a hallmark of textiles of this type.

Other features, such as the use of wool, tapestry weave, and bright colors, also suggest pre-Islamic textile traditions from Egypt. For example, a textile from the Kelsey Museum (see Figure 84) has a line of animal and ornamental decoration in red, green, and undyed colors, which pop against the purple background. The line of text, parallel to the decorative band, mirrors the composition, but stands out in its stark, boxy letters and undyed color, which contrasts with the purple background. Though scholars often associate figural imagery with pre-Islamic textile traditions, the faunal iconography on the Tutun textiles is similar to iconography on Fatimid-era tiraz produced in the Nile Delta region. The differences are stylistic, in the particulars of the line, shape, and color in which the imagery is woven. The Lower Egyptian

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478 On this point, see Jacques van der Vliet, “In a Robe of Gold,” 34n48.
479 Ann Arbor, MI., Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, acc. no. 94470.
textiles have softer colors and finer lines. While the style of the Kelsey textile recalls the bright colors, bold lines, and stylized forms of the Roman-Byzantine textile tradition, the composition, with a band of decoration running across the textile, suggests the post-conquest *tiraz* style.\(^{480}\)

Indeed, the Tutun textiles were not the only examples of *tiraz* to employ motifs that scholars traditionally associate with the pre-Islamic period. Textiles produced in Bahnasa (Middle Egypt) are stylistically similar to examples from the Fayum (*Figure 90*). Made of wool or thick linen, sometimes with iconography in silk tapestry weave, these examples are woven in dark blues, light green, red, and brown. Their iconography, consisting of faunal imagery, recalls the arts of the Abbasid Dynasty as represented by surviving objects and monuments from Samarra, in modern-day Iraq. An example in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo has the *kufic* inscription “made in the *tiraz-al-khassah* in el-Bahnasa.” This means that the textile was made in an “official” private workshop, in which production was directly controlled by the caliph. Though stylistically different from *tiraz* produced in Lower Egypt, the textile is equally “official.”

Though their stylistic links to Egyptian textiles of the Roman-Byzantine era suggest early Islamic dates, the Tutun textiles seem to have a longer history in Egypt. The Katoen Natie example has been Carbon-14 dated to 1029-1219, well beyond the Tulunid period (868-905) to which the textiles had previously been dated. The textile continues the stylistic tradition of Roman-Byzantine textiles, yet hundreds of years after the Arab conquest, and during a period in which textiles of completely different stylistic schemes may have been more common. It is true that Middle and Upper Egypt, including the Fayum region, were known for the production of wool textiles. The writer and geographer Ibn Hawkal (d. 978) wrote that in Bahnasa, many

\(^{480}\) On the evolution of textiles in Roman-Byzantine and Islamic Egypt, see Frances Pritchard, *Clothing Culture: Dress in Egypt in the First Millennium AD* (Manchester: Whitworth Gallery, 2006), 13-26.
textiles “are made with wool, linen, and dyes that do not fade, and colors in which you can see figures, (ranging from) the gnat to the elephant.” The writer and geographer Al-Maqdisi (945/6-991) noted the prevalence of wool in textiles produced in Upper Egypt. The Katoen Natie textile and others like it, though unusual in appearance for textiles of their era, may actually have been common for textiles produced in the Fayum. Yet, for this period, the tenth- to thirteenth-century Naqlun cemetery A, located in the Fayum, includes many more shrouds of the more “typical” tiraz style (associated with Lower Egypt).

It seems that the wearers of the Katoen Natie example and others associated with Tutun chose to wear textiles that stylistically emphasized the local production of the object and, perhaps even, with its archaizing style, the long heritage of artistic production in Egypt. In his study of the iconographic elements of wall paintings produced in 1233 at the Monastery of St. Antony that are not part of the Christian repertoire, William Lyster showed that in many places, the artists depicted stylistic elements from Fatimid art and architecture (969-1171). He notes that this iconography may have become conventional in Coptic painting and may thus have been artistic prototypes rather than specifically chosen motifs. However, he also notes that several elements, including the calligraphy of some of the painted tiraz inscriptions, appear “almost consciously retardataire.” It is possible that the painter employed such outdated motifs in order to archaize the images, to showcase the longstanding Christian tradition in Egypt. Indeed, Bolman has argued that many other elements of the program, including a painting style recalling

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482 Serjeant, Islamic Textiles, 155.
artwork of the early Christian era and imagery of the fathers of the Coptic church presenting a “genealogy of Coptic monasticism,” emphasize the longstanding Christian tradition in Egypt. Perhaps we can interpret the Tutun textiles in a similar way. It is possible that, by choosing to wear a textile that stylistically recalled the pre-Islamic artistic tradition, the wearer hoped to emphasize the longstanding Christian heritage of Egypt. The presence of the Coptic script on the textile would magnify this effect.

The visual elements of the monochrome silk Victoria & Albert Museum textile (see Figure 72), on the other hand, engages stylistic trends for textiles that reached beyond the Coptic community, and even beyond Egypt. This shows that Copts participated in interregional and interconfessional networks, while still marking textiles as their own. The delicate cloth of this textile is woven from fine linen threads in their natural undyed color. The textile is a linen 1:1 tabby weave with silk brocade in a lozenge pattern. The inscription and the lines surrounding it are in black and red wool.

With its linen ground fine weave, soft surface, and pale color, the textile may have belonged to the type known in the medieval Arab world as dabiqi. Medieval texts often refer to dabiqi as silken (hariri، حريري)，meaning that they, like the Victoria & Albert Museum textile, had silk interwoven with the linen. The term dabiqi referred to the Egyptian city, Dabiq, probably in the Nile Delta. By the medieval period, however, these textiles were produced in multiple locations. Most surviving examples that have been identified as dabiqi are of Egyptian provenance, particularly from the Delta, but also from Upper Egypt. As noted already, Fayum

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486 Sokoly, “Tiraz Textiles from Egypt,” 9, 72.
was best known for textiles made of wool. The linen-silk textile was still likely made in the Fayum, though this was not the most prevalent fabric type in the region. This suggests that it was a specialist textile rather than an everyday one, a luxury object with fine materials imported into the region.

The most luxurious textiles included gold filaments. These textiles are referred to in Arabic as *mudhahhab* (مذهب). Goitein observes that *dabiqi* and *mudhahhab* were sometimes combined in a single textile.\(^{487}\) The silk brocade decoration of the Victoria & Albert Museum textile gives the cloth a subtly lustrous finish that recalls gold and might have been intended to emulate such golden textiles, many of which were produced for the caliphal court and its representatives.

In 998, the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir hosted envoys from the Byzantine court. According to the eleventh-century treatise produced at the Fatimid court, the *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, the Abbasids hung:

> Twelve thousand five hundred curtains of gold brocade, [some] with medallions containing images of horses, camels, elephants, and lions, and [some] having *tiraz* beautifully embroidered in gold thread.\(^{488}\)

The textiles were carefully chosen to evoke opulence and prestige in both the eyes of the Abbasids and those of their Byzantine guests. The Byzantine envoys had traveled to Baghdad to appeal for the return of Byzantine captives, a request the Abbasids granted. Yet the Abbasids conceded to the Greeks’ entreaty while maintaining the upper hand. The golden brocade,

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\(^{487}\) Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society IV*, 166.

inscribed with the name of the caliph, was part of this display, expressing that the political and material superiority of the Abbasids.

The Abbasid brocade textile evoked a pan-Eurasian visual culture. Beginning in the tenth century, lampas, a weave in which the ground weave is of a different structure from the pattern weave, became popular throughout Eurasia, and was employed on the finest textiles in Western Europe, Byzantium, and the Abbasid and Fatimid caliphates (Figure 91). In this period, lampas was often monochrome gold, white, or ivory. The brocade on the Victoria & Albert Museum textile is technically much simpler than lampas and includes more basic patterns than the complex figural designs found in lampas. However, the tonal color scheme of the tiraz has a similar visual effect to the luxury fabric. Other techniques were exploited to provide similar monochrome effects. Of particular note, a damask discovered in the Buddhist Silk Road site of Dunhuang, in western China has a color scheme and pattern almost identical to that of the tiraz (Figure 92). While the geographic distance between the Fayum and Dunhuang is too great to suggest a direct link between the textiles, it is important to realize that the visual elements of the Victoria & Albert Museum cloth link it (and the wearer) to a broader, Afro-Eurasian visual culture, whereas the distinct visual effect of the script suggests a specific, and insular, link to the Coptic community.

Inscription

Inscriptions on Christian tiraz fall into two categories: petitionary prayers and quotations from the psalms. While several textiles have both types of inscriptions, the categories do not overlap and appear to have different meanings. For this reason, I will consider these inscription types separately.
**Petitionary Prayers**

The Coptic inscription on the Benaki textile reads, “Oh Lord, Jesus Christ! Help Father Toter. Amen! So be it! Oh Lord! This mercy on me, I shall not want. Amen [?].”489 It follows an invocative formula common to Christian tiraz. Other examples of this formula are: “Jesus Christ, Help me Bestos the Hermit,” on a textile from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Washington, D.C.);490 “Lord Jesus Christ…help Father Victor,” in an example in the Louvre;491 and “Jesus Christ, Son of God help for Maria the daughter of Samuel’s son Joseph” in the Museum für Byzantinische Kunst (Berlin).492 Each inscription begins with an invocation to Christ, continues with a characteristic verb such as to help (Βοηθεί), to bless (Ϲμογ), or to protect ( ‫Δρε) in the imperative tense with the wearer as object. It is crucial to note that the inscription defines the wearer by his or her social position in the Coptic community, for instance, monk, priest, daughter, son.

**Psalm Verses**

489 ἴς ΧϹ ΒΩΘΙ ΠΑΝΑ ΘΩΤΕΡ ΄ΑΜΗΣ ΕΕΕΩΡΟΙ ΨΕΙΝΑ ΝΗΑΙ ΕΥΤΡΑ ΤΑΜΩΝΤ ΑΝ ΕΝΛΑΟΥΕ. Fluck, “Inscribed Textiles,” 183 (cat. no. 124 A). While the inscription follows a common formula of petitionary prayers, at the end of the inscription there is a phrase that is a corrupted version of part of psalm 22.1. For further discussion of this inscription, see below.
490 …ΒΟΗΘΙΑ ΕΡΟΥ ΑΝΩΚ ΒΗΣΤΩΣ ΧΡΗΕ…
Inscriptions of the Psalms, on the other hand, focus on the wearer and his or her relationship with Christ in a different way. The Coptic inscription on the Victoria & Albert Museum textile reads, “[And] he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Arabia” (Psalm 71:15a). The verse on the Katoen Natie reads, “It is God who girds me with strength; He made my way spotless, (He) who straightens my feet like those of hinds. (?) You made me superior over all my adversaries, and humiliated all my enemies behind (?) my (sic desinit)” (Psalm 17:33-34a). The textile is also inscribed with unidentified lines that may be paraphrases of Psalm 17:40-41. Jacques van der Vliet has categorized Psalms 71 and 17, along with many of the other Psalms inscribed on Christian tiraz, as messianic psalms. A common theme in many of these psalms is God’s munificence toward the Davidic Kings—the Old Testament kings of David’s line—and humankind generally.

Arabic Inscriptions

These Coptic inscriptions differ fundamentally from those found in Arabic-Islamic tiraz, which follow an entirely different formula. Typical examples of Arabic-Islamic tiraz include: the

493 Z]ncetɔ kai doxncetɔ wɔtɔ ek tw χριστού tɔn arɔbic.
494 πνοιεί πετιοπόρο ναι νογασά 
πνοιεί πετιορό ναι νογασά 
ταβ α˦ka 全域旅游 e eccoyab
ταβ α˦ka λαgies eccoyab
ἐτσαυτῆν ναυγριφ- ε ἐς νανιογλ
ἐτσαυτῆν Να[ο]γρεφε ἐς νανιογλ
ἀκταρα ναι γιαρεν ναχνεξει τερο
ἀκταρα ναι [γιαρε]ε ναχνεξει τερο
ἀκεβία ναγα-
ἀκθεβία ναγαξε ʔα πεθνυ να- Van der Vliet, “In a Robe of Gold,” 50.
495 Van der Vliet, “In a Robe of Gold,” 43.
496 Van der Vliet, “In a Robe of Gold,” 43.
497 A well-known exception is the turban of Samuel-Ibn Musa, which was inscribed in Arabic with the phrase, “This turban belongs to Samuel ibn Musa, made in Rajab, at Sanhour, Fayum, in the year…88…”

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Bismillah, “In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful;” the name and title of the caliph; prayers on behalf of the caliph; the name of the vizier who ordered the textile; the location of the factory where the textile was produced; the name of the supervisor; and the date of production. In the Fatimid period, inscriptions became more elaborate, adding Shi’i-Ismaili sectarian phrases such as “their pure ancestors.” Tiraz of the Ismaili dynasty eventually listed the name of the caliph along with his predecessors in order to stress his legitimacy. In short, different types of information were supplied by Arabic versus Christian tiraz inscriptions. While the Arabic examples include information about members of the political regime and the workshop where the textile was made, Coptic inscriptions focus on the wearer and his or her social position in the petitionary prayers, and God’s beneficence on the wearer in the psalm verses.

In each example of the bilingual textiles associated with Tutun, the Arabic inscription provides similar information to that found on tiraz with exclusively Arabic inscriptions, such as where the textile was made, while the Coptic inscription includes messages about the wearer and his or her unique social position. For example, a textile in the Louvre has two Arabic inscriptions (one fragmentary) that each state, “Full prosperity to the owner, what has been made in the tiraz in Tutun in the Fayyum. In the name of God,” and a Coptic inscription, “Lord Jesus

Dating to 707, this example is much earlier than the ones discussed in this chapter. Ibn Musa is also believed to have been a Christian. On this turban, see Muhammad Abdel Aziz Marzouk, “The Turban of Samuel ibn Musa, the earliest dated Islamic textile,” Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University 16.2 (December 1954): 143-151.


Contadini, Fatimid Art in the Victoria and Albert Museum, 53.

Van der Vliet, “In a Robe of Gold,” 34.
Christ, help Raphael, the son of Genarches. Amen.”

According to van der Vliet, the Arabic inscription is “impersonal” and “serves as an introduction to information about the workshop,” while the Coptic one is a “personalized prayer.”

It is worth noting that the Katoen Natie textile is “bilingual,” with its Coptic inscription from the psalms, although the Arabic inscription is either pseudo-script or illegible.

The individualized nature of the Coptic petitionary prayers, mentioning the unique name and social position of the wearer, differentiates Christian *tiraz* from auspicious inscriptions in Arabic *tiraz*. Some eleventh-century *tiraz* textiles in Egypt and elsewhere are inscribed with a single, repeating auspicious word, such as “blessing” (*baraka*) or “good fortune” (*Figure 93*).

In most cases the owner is anonymous, in a few cases, the owner is named, but unlike the Coptic inscriptions the social and familial positions are absent.

Another tradition of blessing inscriptions, this time in Greek, derives from the Byzantine context. These inscriptions can be found on jewelry. They appear to be closer to those on Christian *tiraz*, because they employ Greek versions of the same words used in Christian *tiraz*. For example, a sixth-century bronze snake bracelet from Olympia has the inscription, “Lord, help her who wears it.”

The Greek verb is βοηθεω, the same word (*Βⲟⲏⲥⲉⲓ*) that appears on Coptic and Greek language Christian *tiraz* (Coptic borrows a great deal of vocabulary from Greek). However, there are important differences between the Greek and Coptic formulae. In the

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503 Van der Vliet, “In a Robe of Gold,” 34.
504 Blair, “Inscriptions on Medieval Islamic Textiles,” 98.
Greek inscriptions, the wearer is anonymous, which Annewies van den Hoek, Denis Feissel, and John J. Herrmann suggest may be inherent to the objects’ apotropaic efficacy. The Coptic inscriptions always include both the name and the social status of the wearer. I contend that these elements are key to understanding the meaning of Coptic and Greek language Christian tiraz.

Meanings of Christian tiraz for the Living

Since the inception of the tiraz system during the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750), tiraz textiles were symbols of state-sponsored social and political status. As Yedida Kalfon Stillman observes, by the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786-809), “the production and bestowal of tiraz fabrics and garments were an integral part of royal protocol, an accepted prerogative of the ruler, and medium for demonstrating and extending the prestige of the dynasty and the court to favored individuals.” The hierarchizing function of tiraz continued for centuries, into the period of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517). In a well-known passage, the late fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) wrote that, tiraz “is an emblem of dignity reserved for the sovereign, for those whom he wishes to honor by authorizing them to make use of it, and for those whom he invests with one of the responsible posts of government.” In other words, the caliph (or sultan) used tiraz to define and affirm the state’s socio-politically based system of

509 Similarly, the use of the psalms on Coptic- and Greek-language Christian tiraz differs from the use of inscribed objects in other traditions. A later tradition of garments inscribed with verses from the Qur’an appears in the fifteenth century. A shirt from fifteenth- or sixteenth-century South Asia has the text of the entire Qur’an written in miniscule ink calligraphy. This and similar items were worn under battle armor or by the sick. They differ from the textiles inscribed with the psalms because they have the entire holy book, rather than specifically chosen passages.
class stratification. The content of the inscriptions, listing God, the caliph, and the vizier in a formulaic order from right to left, presents the cosmological-caliphal hierarchy to viewers. The wearer is the fourth individual in this distinct chain of authority, a participant in the state-sponsored social structure. The large scale of production of these objects in unofficial workshops indicates that ordinary individuals desired to partake in this socio-political system.

Depictions of tiraz textiles in art emphasize its hierarchizing function within established systems of governance. The two warriors on an Egyptian paper fragment of the Fatimid era mark their authority with inscribed armbands (Figure 94). While the warriors’ eyes dart to the side, the tiraz bands confront the viewer face-on, at the center of the page. They are bold and large in scale, contrasting with the small-scale pattern, drawn in thin ink lines, of the rest of their garments. The bands mirror a large, bold inscription that forms the sheet’s heading, “power and good fortune to the commander Abu Mansur,” thus placing the warriors’ authority under that of their commander. A frontispiece attributed to Mosul (Iraq) circa 1218-1219 uses tiraz similarly (Figure 95). The eventual Atabeg Badr al-Din Lu'lu' (1160-1259) marks his authority with armbands inscribed with his own name. Badr al-Din Lu’lu’ was a slave who rose in the ranks of the Zengid regime (1127-1250) to become the most powerful man in Mosul upon the death of the atabeg in 1210. In 1233 the Abbasid Caliph installed Badr al-Din Lu’lu’ as official client emir. The tiraz with his name proclaims his sovereignty despite the fact that at the time the manuscript was made he was not yet official ruler of the region. His attendants wear uninscribed

513 د. الأوأبف, *أللفادإ المتصور*.
arm bands, which articulate a hierarchy from sovereign to subject, affirming his distinction from those that serve him despite his own origin as an enslaved person.

*Tiraz* could serve a similar function of social stratification in Coptic contexts. In wall paintings in the Monastery of St. Antony near the Red Sea, twelve saints wear *tiraz* armbands (Figure 96). Lyster notes that these figures are of episcopal rank.\(^{515}\) The armbands suggest the figures’ positions in the Coptic Church and also, according to Lyster, their status as court officials. The ruling elite of the Coptic Church held powerful administrative positions in political governance, particularly in the Fatimid era.\(^{516}\) The *tiraz* band on the shawl of Saint Mark in a twelfth-century gospel book frontispiece may hold similar meaning of social prestige (Figure 97).\(^{517}\) Patriarch Mark III (r. 1166-1189) is the only figure in the manuscript’s seventy-seven illuminations to wear *tiraz*. The motif indicates his executive authority in church and state. The *tiraz* is one of several motifs, along with the bow and arrow and throne, that allude to his power. As in the image of Badr al-Din Lu’lu discussed above, *tiraz* defines a social and political hierarchy, here between the patriarch and his attendant, who does not wear *tiraz*.

But *tiraz* could also define uniquely Coptic social systems. A series of thirteenth-century paintings of Arabic—not Coptic—*tiraz* inscriptions are found on the textiles associated with holy men in the wall paintings at the Monastery of St. Antony (Figure 98). Although conventionally the name of the caliph would have been inscribed on this kind of textile, here the name of Jesus Christ, *al-Fadi*, “The Redeemer,” is used instead. In other words, the visual tradition of *tiraz*...
textiles is appropriated from Islamic models, but the content of the inscriptions is adapted to suit a Christian-Arabic context.\footnote{Lyster, “Reflections of the Temporal World,” 110-111.}

The textiles in the wall painting program at the Monastery of St. Antony likely reflect a broader tradition of actual inscribed textiles in medieval Egypt. We saw above that van der Vliet has shown that many of the psalms inscribed on the Coptic and Greek language Christian \textit{tiraz} discuss God’s beneficence on the Davidic king and humankind generally. These so-called messianic psalms were traditionally associated with Christ and call to mind both the ideal rule of the Davidic kings and Christ himself as king. By substituting the name of the caliph with a message that God is the true king of heaven and earth, these textiles replace an expression of Islamic political hierarchies with an inscription expressing a uniquely Christian worldview. That \textit{tiraz} were traditionally gifts from sovereign to esteemed subjects, and the messianic psalms discuss the generosity of God to the Davidic kings, emphasizes this translated correspondence. That is to say both the original function of \textit{tiraz} as robes of honor and the messianic psalms inscribed on some examples of Christian \textit{tiraz} evoke generous gifts from sovereign to subject.

The Meanings of Christian \textit{tiraz} for the Dead

As discussed in detail in Chapter Three, Jochen Sokoly has argued that medieval Muslims in Egypt employed \textit{tiraz} as burial garments because of the textiles’ meanings within Islamic eschatological beliefs. Sokoly argues that medieval Egyptians chose to use \textit{tiraz} shrouds because they believed the caliph possessed blessing (\textit{baraka}) that could be transmitted to the deceased via his inscribed name on the textile.\footnote{Jochen Sokoly, “Between Life and Death: The Funerary Context of \textit{Tiraz} Textiles,” in \textit{Islamische Textilkunst des Mittelalters: Aktuelle Probleme}, ed. Karel Otavsky (Riggisberg, Switzerland: Abegg-Stiftung, 1997), 71-78.} This \textit{baraka} may have been particularly desirable because
medieval Muslims believed in “tortures of the grave,” in which the deceased could feel the physical aspects of burial, such as bodily decay and loneliness. Leor Halevi suggests that many individuals chose to use such shrouds in order to ward off physical discomforts during the intermediate state.

Coptic and Islamic Egyptians’ conception of the intermediate state between death and resurrection differed fundamentally. As noted in the previous chapter, while deceased Muslims were thought to lie alone in the grave, Christian souls were thought to depart from lifeless bodies and enter the intermediate garden along with other members of the Christian community. Depictions of the intermediate state, seen in two wall paintings, one from the ninth-century phase of the Monastery of the Syrians (see Figure 18) and one from the thirteenth-century phase of the Monastery of St. Antony (see Figure 3), demonstrate the centrality of the Christian community. As described in Chapter Two of this dissertation, the images depict the blessed relaxing in the bosoms of the Patriarchs, clustered together and sharing sweet grapes. Below the painting from the Monastery of St. Antony, in an inverse scene, a solitary soul, Nineve (the Coptic name for the rich man in the parable of Lazarus) endures a fiery inferno. Paradise contained a community of the saved, to which the suffering Nineve reaches out but cannot join.

The inscription on the Benaki textile (see Figure 71) and others with petitionary prayers differ from Arabic benedictory inscriptions because they cite the name and social position of the wearer. The social positions noted on Christian tiraz—wife, daughter, monk, priest—are the very ones denoted in Coptic funerary prayers. We should consider the possibility that certain medieval Egyptian Christians chose to be buried in these textiles because the inscriptions emphasized their

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position in the Christian community, which persisted as the defining social structure of heavenly paradise. I propose that through the prayers recited during internment and the inscriptions on the textiles in which Christian bodies awaited resurrection, the deceased was not only named as an individual, but he or she was also situated in the community of the Christian faithful through the reference to his or her social identity.

Textiles with inscriptions from the psalms were equally engaged with the funerary ritual. The psalms were a fundamental part of Coptic ritual generally and were included in funerary and commemorative rituals. The community congregated, chanting the tunes of the psalms, to wish the deceased peace in the afterlife. The link between the psalms, community, and burial dress was particularly strong. In his liturgical ordinances, the Coptic Pope Gabriel V (r. 1409-1427) wrote that when a Bishop or Patriarch dies, the community surrounds him and recites the entirety of the Book of Psalms, while wrapping him in his shrouds. The psalms were an integral part of the community’s preparations of the body for burial and were intimately tied to enshrouding.

Like petitionary prayers, inscriptions of the psalms related intricately to conceptions of the afterlife. The association of Christ with David is a typological interpretation, which represents an extremely prevalent type of medieval Coptic exegesis. As discussed in Chapters One and Two of this dissertation, in the Coptic conception of the afterlife, time and space collapsed. The present world of the living, the intermediate state of the deceased, and the Heavenly Kingdom of the Resurrection were consciously muddled and linked. Many of the inscriptions of the psalms on Christian tiraz emphasize this typological mode, collapsing time, space, and identity. For example, the inscription on the Victoria & Albert Museum textile reads, “and he shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Arabia.” Like many of the inscriptions on Christian tiraz, it refers directly to God’s gifts to the kings of David’s line. Yet it is the
textile’s owner who wears the “gold of Arabia,” a glittering garment evoking imported riches. In this way, the textile creates a typological association between Christ, the Davidic king, and the textile’s wearer. Inscriptions on Arabic tiraz evoke the hierarchy of the Islamic political state, drafting a chain of command from God, to the caliph to the vizier, and finally the wearer. The Coptic inscriptions portray a parallel hierarchy, through the use of typology, from Christ, to the Davidic king, to the textile’s wearer. Old Testament, New Testament, and the present collapse into one, as do the past world of David, the present wearer in life and death, and the Messianic King himself, Christ at the End of Days.

A wearer fashioning themself as a *tupos* (a type) for Christ and the Davidic kings might seem hubristic to modern sensibilities, but Stephen Davis has shown that Coptic wearers of a slightly earlier period, from the fourth to the eighth century, mobilized clothing in practices of devotional mimesis. He notes that Egyptian theologians such as Athanasius (c.296–373) and Cyril of Alexandria (376–444) wrote that believers should participate in the incarnation, whether through ingesting the eucharist or through clothing themselves in imagery of Christ. Davis writes, “the wearing of clothing with images from Christ’s life produced ritualized bodies that mimetically participated in the incarnation, bodies vested with apotropaic power.”522 According to Davis, this power was well suited to the context in which most late antique and medieval Egyptian textiles were found: burial settings. The fact that the deceased participated in the incarnation imbued them with protective power. “The result” he shows, “was a posthumous performance of human assimilation to the divine image that was enabled and effected through the incarnate Word’s conquering of death.”523

522 Davis, “Fashioning a Divine Body,” 361.
Some Christian tiraz with inscriptions of the psalms evoked death more directly. Due to the small size of the known corpus of this material, there is only a single psalm that is used on more than one extant example of Christian tiraz. In fact, the psalm is employed on three extant examples, including a phrase at the end of the Benaki textile. The psalm has clear funerary connotations. It is, as readers may guess, psalm 22 in the Septuagint (known as psalm 23 in the Western tradition):

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. 524

While the use of this psalm in funerals became very popular in the English-speaking world in the twentieth century, the relationship of the psalm to death and afterlife is evident in a premodern context. Death is specifically noted in the line, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” Yet the psalm also emphasizes a comforting afterlife. Even in death, the psalm notes, “I will fear no evil for thou art with me.” The importance companionship and community, even after death, is emphasized. The rod and the staff mentioned in the text are symbolic of a shepherd, evoking the common notion of God as the shepherd who leads his flock. The flock

524 πενθαλμοσνάγειηπτοικοεικπονεπονέποινηπνιτραψψώςπωςτάναλαγ
απτραγωνγόγογονογοτογετανιογο
evokes the vast community of the Christian faithful. The psalm, then, emphasizes the death of
the individual and the presence of God and the Christian community in the afterlife: that the
wearer is not alone. The Christian tiraz shroud on which this psalm was inscribed equally evoked
the ideas described in the words of the psalm. The body of the deceased lies, comforted, wrapped
in this material manifestation of the Christian faith and community and with God himself.

Conclusion
Arabic tiraz textiles commonly functioned as robes of honor, given from rulers to chosen
subjects. Whether gifted to a Christian or Muslim recipient, these textiles denoted participation
in the political structure of caliphal courts. Even unofficial tiraz conveyed social status within the
frameworks and norms of the caliphates. While at a distance, Christian tiraz would have
appeared to conform to this same system of social prestige, on closer examination the content of
the inscriptions reveals that textiles like that in the Benaki Collection do not participate in a
political system of meaning. They instead call attention to the wearers’ actual positions in the
Christian community and typological relationship to the great figures of the Old and New
Testament. Whether inscribed with petitionary prayers, verses of the psalms, or both, Christian
tiraz textiles functioned both for the living and the dead by emphasizing the membership of the
wearer in the Coptic community in life and by alluding to his or her place in a community of the
saved after death, a distinct conception of afterlife in which past, present, and future elide.
PART III:

Marking the Coptic Grave
CHAPTER V

Christian and Islamic Grave Makers: Visitation, Community, and the Afterlife in the

Medieval Nile Valley

Sometime in the eighth century, two Christian Egyptian men, Theordoros and Kosman, died. They were laid to rest in a burial ground in the Fayum region of central Egypt, a cemetery likely filled with fellow Christians. Their bodies and shrouds have decayed, melding with the earth in which they were buried. The only material remains of their lives is a limestone tombstone now in the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst in Berlin (Figure 99). The tombstone is tall and narrow with a rounded top. The main decorative element is a carved architectural frame, which surrounds an epitaph. Columns adorned with palm fronds and crosses, with capitals shaped like palm fronds, support a dome formed of laurel leaves, with a large shell motif at center. A Greek cross overlies the epitaph. The Coptic inscription emphasizes the deceased’s Christian faith. It expresses the hope that they may “rest in the bosom of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.” The bosom of the Patriarchs is the garden in which the Christian faithful were thought to spend the intermediate state between death and the Resurrection. From the


526 ΝΚΛΑΤΒΟΥ ΓΝΚΟΥΝΤΠ ΝΝΑΒΡΑΑΜ ΝΗ ΙΣΑΑΚ ΝΗ ΙΑΚΩΒ.
Coptic inscription, to the content of the epitaph, to the cross motifs, the tombstone emphasizes the Christian identity and beliefs of the deceased and their community.\textsuperscript{527}

Just a century later, in 860, Zainan bint al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Basri was buried in the ‘Ain al-Sira cemetery south of Cairo. A marble tombstone marked her grave (\textbf{Figure 100}).\textsuperscript{528} As in the tombstone of Theodoros and Kosmas, an architectural motif frames the epitaph. The columns are rounded and topped with floriated capitals that recall the curve of the palm fronds on the Fayum example. The Arabic epitaph is carved in deep recess. Included in the epitaph is the \textit{shahadah}, the Islamic profession of faith, proclaiming that “there is no God but Allah Alone, who has no partner, and that Muhammad is his slave and messenger.”\textsuperscript{529} The tombstone thus proclaims Zainan’s Muslim identity.

The two stelae are part of corpora of thousands of extant Christian and Islamic tombstones from late antique (for the Christian material) and medieval (for both categories of objects) Egypt. Yet despite their striking similarity in iconography, and the iconographic similarities of other examples (discussed below), scholars have not systematically studied the Christian and Islamic tombstones together, as branches of a single Egyptian tradition. In this

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{527} Though the present chapter focuses on Christian and Islamic objects from the period following the Islamic conquest of Egypt (c. 641 through c. 1300), much of the material from which these objects evolved are Christian tombstone from the late antique period (c. 300-700). For this reason, this chapter discusses the earlier objects in depth. In the introduction to this dissertation, I note that I refer to most of the Christian objects covered in the dissertation as “Coptic,” because they were used by members of the Miaphysite Coptic Church. In this chapter, however, many of late antique objects discussed could have been used by either Coptic Christians or Dyophyse “Orthodox” Christians, known in Egypt as Melkites. For this reason, I refer in most cases to “Egyptian” Christians rather than “Coptic” Christians. On these terms, the religious groups, and their histories, see the introduction to this dissertation.
\item \textsuperscript{529} لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله
\end{itemize}
chapter, I undertake this task, examining these objects within both their larger regional and specific religious contexts.

Tombstones were but one category of object for which Christians and Muslims employed similar iconographies and styles. Scholars have shown that in medieval Egypt these two groups shared close cultural affinities, often using almost identical material culture, including in religious settings. However, their religions had strong distinctions in practice and belief, which necessarily made adherents of different faiths tailor the appearances and meanings of the objects they used in sacred contexts. In the case of funerary art, Christianity and Islam had sharp distinctions in eschatology (a point discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation) and practices around the visitation of graves. Through comparison of tombstones from Christian and Islamic contexts in conjunction with study of traditions and eschatological beliefs, I show that Christians and Muslims called on a shared artistic tradition to express different beliefs and practices.

In the early centuries of Islamic rule in Egypt, Muslims formed a unique identity through the visual features of their tombstones, following strictures of the hadith (sayings of the Prophet). I show that some Muslims, however, employed prototypes from Christian grave markers, visually and culturally translating them to fit conventions of Islamic law. In contrast, as the

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531 On translation as an interpretive method, see Finbarr Barry Flood, Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), esp. 1-14. Also see the introduction to this dissertation.
centuries passed and Islam became the dominant religion in Egypt, Christians began to assimilate to Islamic models for tombstones, though their own religious conventions did not require the distinctive visual elements found in the Islamic examples. Yet the composition and language of the epitaphs—what Irene Bierman would term the territorial and referential functions of the text—remained distinct. This suggests that it is iconographical and formal elements of epitaphs—the aesthetic functions of the text—not textual content, that medieval Christians found adaptable in religious contexts.

Funerary Stelae and the Coptic Tradition

Thelma K. Thomas has undertaken the most comprehensive analysis of the iconography and style of late antique funerary sculptures. Focusing on the third to seventh centuries, Thomas discusses the functions of these objects, the way they marked identity for the deceased, and their meaning for the living. Thomas notes that late antique Egyptian funerary sculpture could take many forms, including gravestones (also known as stelae), friezes, and niche decorations built into larger structures, such as mausolea. The stelae could stand freely, or be embedded in walls

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532 Irene A. Bierman, Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 16-20. Also see the introduction to this dissertation.
533 Thelma K. Thomas, Late Antique Funerary Sculpture: Images from This World and the Next (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). On the formulae of inscriptions, which are discussed below, the most recent comprehensive work is Bianca Tudor, Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab Periods from Egypt (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2011).
535 Thomas, Late Antique Funerary Sculpture, 5.
or floors. They could also lie in niches or mounds.\textsuperscript{536} Many graves had no funerary sculptures at all, and this lack of sculpture was also common in the medieval period. This was likely for economic reasons, because stone funerary sculptures were one of the costliest elements of burials and therefore were not found in cemeteries in poorer or smaller communities.\textsuperscript{537}

Of relevance to the comparative focus on Christian and Islamic Egyptian stelae in the medieval period, Thomas looks at differences in the late antique corpus between Christian and pagan funerary sculpture. Late antiquity was a period, as I discuss in Chapter Four of this dissertation, in which burials in Egypt were characterized by a great deal of syncretism.\textsuperscript{538} Christians and pagans were laid to rest in the same burial grounds, and their burial objects often included visual markers of both Christian and pagan identity. Thomas notes that no known Christian funerary sculpture (meaning sculptures with uniquely Christian iconography) can be dated to prior to the fourth century.\textsuperscript{539} The differences between Christian and pagan funerary sculptures can be subtle; they are, nonetheless, meaningful. While Thomas discerns no distinctly Christian style, she does see a clearly Christian iconography, with common motifs employed across Christian communities.\textsuperscript{540} She notes that “personal identification was, at least iconographically, of secondary importance in the Christian monuments. Corporate membership was key: Christian attached themselves to a future community by representing motifs reflective

\textsuperscript{536} Thomas, \textit{Late Antique Funerary Sculpture}, 5.
\textsuperscript{537} Thomas, \textit{Late Antique Funerary Sculpture}, 5.
\textsuperscript{538} Indeed, Tudor notes that “Results yielded by archaeological excavations show that commingled internments of Christians and Pagans occurred between the fourth and the eighth centuries in the Alexandrine catacombs (except for the ones in Karmuz), Madinat Ghurab, Herakleopolis Magna, Qarara, Panopolis [Akhmim], and the western part of the cemetery of Bagawat.” Tudor, \textit{Christian Funerary Stelae}, 120.
\textsuperscript{539} Thomas, \textit{Late Antique Funerary Sculpture}, 21.
\textsuperscript{540} Thomas, \textit{Late Antique Funerary Sculpture}, 41.
of the citizenship they hoped to attain upon death.”\textsuperscript{541} This emphasis on communal identity in the afterlife, we will see, is evident in the medieval period as well.

Signs of Christian corporate identity could include motifs such as crosses, paradisical imagery, and angels of death, but it could also include images of the deceased in which their status in the Christian community is emphasized.\textsuperscript{542} For example, in the stela of Apa Pachomius from Saqqara an image depicts the deceased dressed in his monastic habit, emphasizing his social position as a monk (\textbf{Figure 101}). An image of a girl shows her dressed in a \textit{peplos}, an ensemble that emphasizes her status as an unmarried woman. Personal traits were not meant to mark the unique appearance of the deceased, but instead their “social type,” their position in the community. Thomas shows that earlier pagan funerary sculpture marked identity in ways related to the concept of \textit{eikonismos}, “a codified and formulaic language used for census records and other legally identifying descriptions…that was taken over in the pseudo-science of physiognomy, the art of judging character from physical appearance, and found parallels in late antique portrait types.”\textsuperscript{543} Mythological themes on these pagan sculptures often marked personality traits of the deceased, such as the use of images of Apollo for intellectuals or images of Heracles for athletes.\textsuperscript{544}

Christian late antique funerary sculpture also used \textit{eikonismos} as a means of representing the deceased, but the function behind this choice differed from uses in pagan contexts. “Intersession for the dead,” Thomas notes, “was effected by intervening portrait types, and these


\textsuperscript{542} Thomas, \textit{Late Antique Funerary Sculpture}, 73-80.

\textsuperscript{543} Thomas, \textit{Late Antique Funerary Sculpture}, 60.

\textsuperscript{544} Thomas, \textit{Late Antique Funerary Sculpture}, 60-61.
typological portraits offered visions through which a living viewer would recognize a real
presence. Recognition of the living by the dead required that these typological portraits contain
traits associated with the deceased, such as the clothing of a deacon or a monastic deacon." It
is important to note, I suggest, that the types of individuals shown in these sculptures are the
categories that were noted in the Christian funerary liturgy and graveside prayers. Individuality,
then, is not stressed; instead membership in the Christian community is emphasized. This shows
that, following Thomas’s analysis, the images of the deceased in Christian funerary sculpture are
more invested in the expression of communal identity than in the identity of unique individuals.

Whether displaying a portrait or an aniconic motif, many Christian funerary stelae of late
antique Egypt feature central iconography displayed within architectural imagery. Alexandre
Badawy shows that this composition was also common on pagan funerary sculpture. It even
recalls the “false-door” funerary stelae of the Pharaonic period. In Christian contexts, the
architectural motifs recall doors, connoting the doors of Paradise. They also recall sacred
architecture, such as the entrance to the sanctuary of a church, evoking the relationship between
the layout of churches and the cosmos (discussed briefly below, and in detail in Chapter One of
this dissertation).

The arrangement of these stelae in relation to viewers may have recalled the spatial
organization of the cosmos, in which the blessed deceased were thought to reside in heavenly
paradise, which was separated from the world of the living by the firmament. A stela in the
Coptic Museum in Cairo, for example, places a portrait of a deceased woman within an

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545 Thomas, Late Antique Funerary Sculpture, 70.
546 Alexandre Badawy, Coptic Art and Archaeology: The Art of the Christian Egyptians from the Late
547 Alexandre Badawy, “La stèle funéraire copte à motif architectural,” Bulletin de la Société
architectural niche (Figure 102). She stands before a chancel screen, the barrier between the haykal (sanctuary) and khurus (a space between the naos and sanctuary), indicating her position in the khurus. Coptic Christians associated the khurus with the garden of the intermediate state, and the haykal with the heavenly paradise that would come into being after the Second Coming of Christ. The deceased woman’s presentation in the khurus of a church, then, suggests her location in the paradisical garden. Above her head is a shell, a symbol of the firmament separating heaven and earth.548 Birds, symbols of heavenly paradise, sit above the architecture, and crosses, symbolic of salvation, beside the deceased.

These motifs compound the architectural symbolism of her environment. The backs and sides of the stela includes evidence of fastenings that suggest that the stone was affixed to a wall. Its pristine condition, lacking obvious weathering, suggests that it remained inside a funerary structure, such as a mausoleum. We can imagine it hovering above the head of the deceased, buried in the earth below. Inside the mausoleum, while facing the grave, visitors saw the small colonnade carved into the stelae, appearing almost as if at a distance. The birds and crosses peeking out from the niche suggest that behind this architectural structure lies paradise, where the soul of the deceased, having departed the body interred below the tombstone, rests in the bosom of the Patriarchs in the intermediate state. Beyond her is the Heavenly Kingdom of the Apocalypse, where she and her community will ultimately gather. The layout of the stela suggests a window of communication to the deceased in her resting place in paradise.549 The architectural motif also suggests the tomb as a whole.

548 Indeed, Thomas notes that “shells, for example, symbols of the watery firmament, separating celestial zones, appear above many an Oxyrhynchite portrait, indicating, in part, the figure’s ultimate deification.” Thomas, Late Antique Funerary Sculpture, 70.
While the original placement of the Coptic Museum stela may be cautiously reconstructed, most stelae have been decontextualized, requiring scholars to piece together their original emplacements. Thomas shows that funerary sculpture “took many forms: stelae (gravestones), which might be freestanding or embedded in walls or floors or emplaced within niches in mounds, as well as friezes and niche decorations in grander structures.”

Bianca Tudor suggests that stelae could have functioned in a number of placements around graves. She writes that “As a rule, Christian funerary stelae were erected in front of the tombs as head or footstones, covered burial fossae and shafts, were incorporated into bench-like superstructures and large mud brick cases, were enclosed in one of the inner walls of the funerary chapels, or were set up above the entrance into the respective chapels.”

The orante (a gesture with outstretched hands, indicating prayer) position of many of the figures on colonnade stelae both shows their holiness, emulating the position of Christ on the cross, and depicts them in eternal prayer. It also reflects the rites that took place at Christian graves. In her close analysis of the uses and functions of niche statuary, Thomas notes that niches in tombs, the earliest extant type of Christian funerary sculpture, were symbolic of sanctuaries, indicative of the rites that took place there. Similar meanings probably applied to colonnade stelae, which recalled both whole tombs and church architecture. The use of iconography evoking churches at a grave suggested that the grave was a holy place in which rites

550 Thomas, *Late Antique Funerary Sculpture*, 5.223.
553 Badawy, *Coptic Art and Archaeology*, 211.
554 Thomas, *Late Antique Funerary Sculpture*, 21.
555 Thomas, *Late Antique Funerary Sculpture*, 18.
took place. Indeed, such rites were observed at tombs as part of the funerary ritual and during regular visitations. In late antiquity, the portion of the funerary rite that took place at the tomb may have included laying the body in a fresh grave, perhaps with prayers and plants, the singing of psalms and hymns, the approach of the tomb by mourners carrying torches, who kissed the tomb, and the leaving of an offering, perhaps Eucharistic, for the deceased.\textsuperscript{557} It is worth noting here that in the medieval period the Great Liturgy of the Dyophysite Orthodox Church was seen to be a ritual retelling of Christ’s funerary rite.\textsuperscript{558} The carrying of the gifts, Christ’s body and blood, to the altar mimicked the carrying of his body to his tomb. Texts discussing liturgical symbolism in the Miaphysite Coptic Church do not go into as much detail but do make clear that they view the Eucharistic gifts as a surrogate for Christ’s body, in commemoration of his sacrificial death, and the altar on which the gifts are prepared as his tomb.\textsuperscript{559} It is only fitting, then, that the portion of funerals that took place at graves (the burial), would be seen as rituals befitting placement in a sanctified space.

But the funerary rite was only one ritual that took place at graves. Coptic Christians regularly visited the deceased and performed rites at the grave. Additionally, they performed commemoration rites in church and in the home. Various traditions existed for the precise number of days after death that commemoration rites should occur. Most sources prescribe


\textsuperscript{559} Gertrud van Loon, The Gate of Heaven-Wall Paintings with Old Testament Scenes in the Altar Room and the Hurus of Coptic Churches (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1999), 121. On the differences between the dyophysite Orthodox Church and the miaphysite Coptic Church, see the introduction to this dissertation.
several rituals within the first 40 days, when the soul was thought to be at its most vulnerable, and on the anniversary of the death. For example, the *Ecclesiastical Canons* (preserved in Sahidic Coptic in an eleventh-century manuscript, as well as in other languages) notes that Christians should commemorate the deceased on the third, seventh, and thirtieth days after death.\(^{560}\) The liturgies of these commemoration rites included various psalms (for example, psalm 50), biblical passages (such as Romans 5, 6-15), and specific prayers (discussed below). While medieval sources to not discuss in detail the rites that take place at the grave, an early twentieth-century liturgical handbook notes that no one liturgy was prescribed for graveside rituals.\(^{561}\) Instead, visitors could choose from a variety of the liturgies employed in church settings. Therefore, rites held grave-side and those held in churches echoed one another.

Additionally, late antique sources, including the *Apostolic Canons*, which may date to the second or third century and are preserved in a manuscript dating to 1005-1006, provide evidence of rites at graves. The *Apostolic Canons* note that commemoration on the third day after death takes place with psalms and prayers\(^{562}\) Archaeological remains provide additional evidence of rites. Tudor notes that some stelae had “niches for sheltering lamps,” or square holes into which lamps or incense may have been set.\(^{563}\) It is important to note that the rites that took place at graves were intercessory in nature. They aimed to connect the living to paradise, while prayers endeavored to assist the deceased in this faraway place.\(^{564}\) The communication between visitors and the deceased was indirect. The early twentieth-century liturgical handbook notes that a

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\(^{563}\) Tudor, *Christian Funerary Stelae*, 135.

\(^{564}\) Thomas, *Late Antique Funerary Sculpture*, 52.
church rite held thirty days, forty days, six months, and one year following death includes a Coptic prayer with the following passage:

The dust has returned to dust, and the spirit has returned to you, our creator, our God and our helper against our enemies, who are strongly arrayed against us. And the body has become dry, the senses have relaxed, the heart has stopped, the struggle has stopped. The ears are blocked, the eyes are closed. The nose breaths no longer. The tongue has fallen silent. The hands are motionless. The feet are still. The elements have returned to their place. The soul is with you in the place of reward ... We incline our heads before your glory and submit to you the bonds of our senses with our inner and outer being, as your servants, almighty God. We implore your goodness, full of mercy, for this pledge, for the soul of your servant NN ... who has completed his month (or his fortieth day, or sixth month, or year) on this day.  

In this prayer, the visitor addresses God directly, speaking about the absent deceased. The text makes this lack of presence clear. It notes that the soul has returned to God, and the body itself lacks awareness and sensation. In this way, the prayer follows the Coptic doctrine of the afterlife, wherein the soul leaves the body after death, spending the intermediate state between death and the Resurrection in a heavenly or hellish realm that prefigures their eternity after the Last Judgment. The community therefore entreats God directly to assist the soul of the deceased.  

As mentioned above, this plea may have been employed at graves, as well as in churches. The prayer was patently Coptic, following this sect’s unique eschatology. The visual features of many tombstones—from niches for incense and lamps, to the orante position in which the deceased was depicted, to the iconography of sanctuaries in colonnaded stelae—related to Christian visitation rites. The next section discusses how Muslims adapted such features of pre-Islamic Christian tombstones, visually translating Christian prototypes to fit uniquely Islamic visitation rituals and beliefs.

566 On this point, see Chapter Two of this dissertation.
“Mihrab Images” in Islamic Practice

The history and meaning of Christian stelae can be used to shed light on an issue that scholars of Islamic art have debated for decades: the original function of a group objects from Egypt and elsewhere in the Islamic world that have been termed “mihrab images.” A stone sculpture in the Islamic Museum in Cairo exemplifies these objects (Figure 103). A rectangular slab of limestone has a border of incised script. Within this text is a pointed arch, supported by spiraled pilasters with rounded capitals. A lamp hangs from the center of the arch, its deftly articulated wick suggesting light and warmth. The remainder of the colonnade is filled with script, the ninth sura (chapter) of the Qur’an, and the epitaph. With its architectural motif and depiction of a hanging lamp, the object resembles a mihrab, the prayer niche found on the qibla in mosques that indicates the direction of prayer toward Mecca. Yet in its flatness, it appears more reminiscent of tombstones. Indeed, the dated inscription clarifies that the object did serve as a tombstone for an individual named Zumurrud Umm Sife, who died in 1181.

An earlier example in the Islamic Museum Cairo shares key iconographic and compositional elements but lacks the depiction of the lamp (see Figure 100). On this rectangular marble tombstone, the capitals of the pilasters are floriated rather than rounded, and the top of the arch is filled with a vegetal motif instead of a lamp. The inscription in kufic script in relief fills the arch. As in the later example, the depiction of the architectural motif suggests a mihrab, but the inscription, commemorating a deceased woman named Zainan bint al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Basri, who died in 860, indicates that the object served as a tombstone. While separated in date of production by more than three-hundred years, the tombstones both share deep iconographic and compositional similarities with Christian colonnade tombstones of late antiquity, suggesting that they both derive from this tradition.
Géza Fehérvári has explored a group of objects to which the Islamic Museum Cairo tombstones belong, asking whether these objects should be understood to function as tombstone or mihrab. Resembling flat maharib, these objects have been found in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, and are variously termed maharib or stelae (the latter implying a funerary function). Fehérvári notes that throughout the Islamic world, funerary stelae mimic the form of maharib, and the imagery usually imitates the form of maharib in the stelae’s region. This suggests a strong parallel between the two, even that the tombstones aspired to look like maharib. Fehérvári makes the important point that a distinct connection must have existed between maharib and tombstones. He proposes that the first mihrab was a large block of stone in the qibla of Muhammad’s house in Medina, marking the place where the Prophet was buried. Fehérvári proposes that Egyptian Christian tombstones served as inspiration for the decoration of such stones in other locations. In other words, Fehérvári suggests that tombstones with architectural motifs preceded maharib, and that Egyptian Christian tombstones were essential to this development. To sum up, Fehérvári argues that flat maharib served either as tombstones or maharib, and that maharib, both flat and niched, developed from grave markers, with Egyptian Christian examples serving as visual inspiration.

Nuha N. N. Khoury has reassessed this material, arguing that flat maharib, which she terms “mihrab images” (صورة محراب; surat mihrab) after references to such objects in the work of the traveler and scholar Ibn Battuta (1304-69) (among other references), relate to death and beliefs about the afterlife rather than mosque maharib, because they often appear in mausolea.

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568 Fehérvári, “Tombstone or Mihrab?: A Speculation,” 241.
569 Fehérvári, “Tombstone or Mihrab?: A Speculation,” 250.
570 Fehérvári, “Tombstone or Mihrab?: A Speculation,” 251.
cenotaphs, shrines, and on tombstones. She argues that they are meant to represent centrally-planned mausolea, elaborate funerary structures in which the wealthy and powerful were buried. The sculptures, however, are principally what Khoury terms “illustrations,” rather than objects indicating the direction of prayer, as we see in mosques. In other words, mihrab images did not serve as foci for prayers, as maharib in mosques did. She shows that mihrab images, whether for funerary use or not, are commemorative in nature. When not serving as a tombstone, they designate the sanctity of a person or place associated with them. She says that, in contrast, “the basis for designating [a] mihrab image a tombstone is limited to its commemorating an identifiable person.” Whether serving primarily as a mihrab, tombstone, or an ex-voto plaque, commemoration was the main function, obscuring divisions between these three types of objects. Mihrab images often are not oriented with the qibla and instead follow rules dictating the orientation of bodies. This means that in burials, mihrab images are parallel to the qibla, since, in Islamic burials, the face of the deceased always looks toward Mecca.

While Fehérvári’s and Khoury’s arguments are instrumental for understanding these objects, neither scholar emphasizes the relationship between mihrab images and the practices that took place at Islamic graves. These customs, I suggest, are a fundamental reason that some Muslims chose to be buried with tombstones that resemble maharib. Comparison with rituals performed at Coptic Christian graves, in the medieval period and the late antique period that

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578 On this point, see below.
preceded it, and visual comparison between the Islamic mihrab images and the Christian colonnade tombstones, support this point. I suggest that the iconography of mihrab images was a conscious adaptation of the Christian tradition, for use in particularly Islamic practices. Comparison in the way that these tombstones looked and functioned helps substantiates this thesis.

While Fehérvári argues for a strong link between Egyptian Christian colonnade tombstones and Islamic flat mahrab (i.e., mihrab images), Khoury argues against any relationship between the two traditions, because the mihrab images do not appear in the earliest corpus of Islamic tombstones in Egypt. Using data from the 1932-1942 catalog of medieval Islamic tombstones in the Islamic Museum in Cairo, I offer a brief overview of the iconographic history of Islamic stelae in Egypt across the medieval period (seventh-thirteenth centuries). I show that, while Khoury is indeed correct in her chronology, this need not mean that Christian colonnade tombstones did not relate to the Islamic mihrab image tradition. The Islamic Museum catalog includes 3,776 tombstones. While the provenience of almost all of these objects is unknown, it is widely accepted that most came from two burial grounds, that of Fustat (Lower Egypt, near Cairo) and that of Aswan (Upper Egypt). My numerical analysis includes 935 examples in the catalog that are 1) photographed, and 2) inscribed with the date of death of the person they commemorate (other examples in the catalog are dated based on stylistic and epigraphical grounds, which I do not believe is precise enough for this type of chronological data analysis and risks making a circular argument).

Like all archaeological collections, the catalog is limited by the accidents of preservation. In this case, the corpus skews heavily towards material from the ninth century, with more than half of the tombstones in the entire catalog of 3,776 examples dated between the years 786 and 1009, and 73% from before the year 912.\(^{580}\) The data including only photographed and precisely dated examples is even more heavily skewed toward these dates, with 78% of tombstones dated between the years 786 and 1009, and 68% prior to the year 912. As seen in graphic analysis, the largest number of tombstones date from 860 to 880 (Figure 104).

Most tombstones in the Islamic Museum are rectilinear in form. Medieval sources refer to such tombstones as بَلَّاطٍ (balata), meaning “slab” or لَوْحٍ (lawh), meaning “plate or plaque.”\(^{581}\) My analysis shows that the earliest Islamic tombstones in Egypt are vertical rectangles with inscriptions as the only decorative motif (Figure 105). Around the 810s, these simple rectangles more often gain a spindly border of foliate motifs (Figure 106). These tombstones peak in popularity around the 820s and drop off throughout the century, disappearing after the year 900. Roughly contemporaneous with the rise and fall of this trend are similar tombstones that show the addition of tabula ansata (a dovetail handle design) at their top (Figure 107). Also in the early ninth century, simple rectangles with thick, unadorned borders become popular (Figure 108). These remain widely used throughout the run of the catalog, which extends, with strongly decreased numbers, until the early fourteenth century. Horizontal rectangular stelae, with and without foliate borders, appear in small numbers from the 840s onwards, jumping and dipping in popularity over time (Figure 109).

Most important to my argument about the visual translation of Christian tombstone prototypes to fit Islamic beliefs and practices, *mihrab* images appear in the mid-ninth century, with the earliest examples dated to 860. These tombstones, which are mostly marble (with a single example in sandstone) are used consistently over the next 27 years, then disappear after the year 887. They appear again 150 years later, in 1038 in basalt, limestone, and sandstone, and are used sporadically, in bursts, until the end of range of the catalog in the early fourteenth century. The break in chronology as well as the differences in materials and visual details suggest that the earlier and later *mihrab* images are different branches of the same tradition, possibly employed at different sites. Of the 935 tombstones included in this dataset, just 23 (2.4%) are *mihrab* images. Even at their peak from 860-880, these tombstones were only 6% of the corpus, with other types being much more popular. From 880-900, the other section of the graph in which they were used, they measure at 2% of the corpus. Yet their small numbers do not make them statistically insignificant for dataset analysis. Indeed, if these *mihrab* images were used in the percentages found from 860-800 and 880-900 (2% and 6%, respectively), we would expect to see at least a few of them in the corpus prior to 860 and between 900 and 1040 (*Figure 110* shows expected versus actual numbers). This suggests, then, that *mihrab* images may not have begun to be used, at least in the graveyards of Fustat and Aswan, until the mid-ninth century.

As noted above, because *mihrab* images are not the earliest Islamic tombstone type in Egypt, Khoury believes that their source cannot be Egyptian Christian colonnade tombstones. However, scholarship on interactions between Christian and Islamic communities in Egypt undertaken since the publication of Khoury’s article suggests otherwise. Finbarr Barry Flood has

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undertaken work on altar stelae in medieval Egypt and Syria (Figure 111). These objects were Christian altars produced in the sixth to eighth centuries that were reused by Islamic communities as tombstones from the ninth to fourteenth centuries. While the meaning of these objects in Syria differed, in Egypt the tombstones were a continuation of a Christian tradition, adapted for Muslim users. Flood shows that altar stelae tended to be used in burials of Muslims in contexts in which the deceased Muslims lived amongst sizable Coptic populations.\(^{583}\) This suggests a degree of intermingling between Christian and Islamic populations. Indeed, the ninth century was a period in which there was great interaction between Christians and Muslims in Egypt, including a wave of conversions.\(^{584}\) While there is no evidence that the individuals who employed \textit{mihrab} images as tombstones were converts, the wave of conversions generally suggests mixing between the two religious communities, which likely led to the spread of knowledge about their traditions and practices. For this reason, some Muslims may have chosen to employ Christian prototypes for their grave markers.

Yet there are key iconographical differences between the Christian and Islamic tombstones. These differences are made plain in Christian colonnade stelae and Islamic \textit{mihrab} images. Both types of tombstones feature arched architectural designs, in many cases with similar pilasters and capitals. However, the Christian arches are often filled with pictorial motifs—of Christian symbols, such as crosses, birds, or angels of death, or portraits of the deceased—whereas in the Islamic ones, the arches are filled with ornate script and, in later examples, hanging lamps. Both types feature foliate designs above the arches. The iconographical differences are consistently evident in tandem with the different religious

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\(^{584}\) Mark N. Swanson, \textit{The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt: 641-1517} (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 39-40.
traditions. It would be inappropriate for a tombstone on an Islamic grave to feature the figural imagery or symbolism employed on Christian colonnade stelae.\textsuperscript{585} Both the Christian and Islamic tombstones appear like their religions’ respective sacred architecture and mausolea. This pattern emphasizes the commonalities between the funerary stelae and architecture, suggesting that the artisans of the Islamic objects took conscious inspiration from the prior Christian stelae, and translated compositions to adhere to Islamic doctrine.\textsuperscript{586}

But why do the Islamic tombstones so closely imitate the appearance of contemporary maharib? Is this because they are a symbol of the Islamic faith that happened to fit seamlessly into the Christian prototype? That may be one reason, but I suggest it is also true that practices Muslims undertook near graves, practices parallel yet intrinsically different from Coptic ones, were the main reason that the appearance of maharib on tombstones were of interest to certain Muslims. Maharib are closely associated with prayer. It is well-known that, from the beginning of Islam, graves were a common locus of visitation in both Sunni and Shi’i traditions.\textsuperscript{587} This practice, known as ziyara, was common for the graves of holy people, such as saints or martyrs, and ordinary individuals.\textsuperscript{588} A common reason for the practice of ziyara was for the undertaking of prayer at the cemetery on behalf of the deceased and the living visitor. Pious deceased were

\textsuperscript{585} Indeed, the use of figural imagery is extremely rare in pre-modern Islamic burial contexts, with the exception of areas under Turkic hegemony. Marco Schöller, \textit{The Living and the Dead in Islam. Studies in Arabic Epitaphs. II Epitaphs in Context} (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), 262.

\textsuperscript{586} On the relationship between these tombstones and religious architecture, see the discussion above.

\textsuperscript{587} It is important to note that, in the Sunni tradition, some opposition to visitation existed. Schöller observes the dichotomy between the arguments of these jurists and widespread practice, and notes that most Sunni traditions permit or support ziyara. Shi’i traditions always encouraged visitation. Schöller, \textit{The Living and the Dead in Islam}, 11-13; 29. Also see Halevi, “The Paradox of Islamization,” 138-50; Christopher S. Taylor, “Reevaluating the Shi’i Role in the Development of Monumental Islamic Funerary Architecture: The Case of Egypt,” \textit{Muqarnas} 9 (1992): 1-10; Caroline Williams, “The Cult of Alid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo Part II: The Mausolea,” \textit{Muqarnas} 3 (1985): 39-60.

\textsuperscript{588} “What is more, no distinction could be made between the visitation of tombs of a ‘private’ character – the tombs of relatives and the like – and of those of a “public” character – the shrines of saintly men and women, or the Shiite Imams because this difference is blurred in most sources.” Schöller, \textit{The Living and the Dead in Islam}, 84.
thought to have the ability to transmit *baraka* (blessing) to visitors. According to a tradition of the Prophet, Muhammad said, “He who visits my grave will be entitled to my intercession.” This concept was later widened to include other revered individuals, and Muslims visited tombs hoping for blessings.

Another important means of prayer was for the deceased rather than the visitor. As discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, medieval Islamic doctrine asserted that deceased individuals, with the exceptions of martyrs, prophets, and, for Shi‘is, Imams, were considered to be conscious in the grave. They were also thought to be able to feel, and all but the pious endured “tortures of the grave,” including the feeling of the grave around them. Prayers at graves aimed to mitigate suffering in this intermediate state. According to the thirteenth-century Yemeni historian al-Yafi‘i, the jurist Isma‘il b. Muhammad al-Hadrami (d. 1278 or 1280) described a visit to a cemetery as follows, “I saw how the people [buried] in this cemetery are chastised and thus I became very sad. Then I asked God that I may intercede on their behalf and He granted me that.” Al-Hadrami refers to the “tortures of the grave,” and shows that his prayers, via God, assisted the deceased. Indeed, even non-supplicatory prayers helped the deceased. According to a Shi‘i tradition, when the living visit graves, the deceased “does not cease to derive comfort with him for as long as he is by his grave. So when he arises and leaves from his grave, loneliness enters into him from his leaving from his grave.” In a similar vein, various Sunni

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traditions note that when visitors recited the Qu’ran or prayers at a grave, the deceased receives comfort.\textsuperscript{592} While, as discussed above, Copts also prayed at graves to assist the deceased, their rituals were not directly communicative with the deceased, as he or she was not understood to be present in the burial. As discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation, Coptic souls were thought to leave interred corpses, spending the intermediate state in a divine garden or a fiery inferno. For this reason, Christian prayers were not directed to the body of the person in the grave, but instead to the soul of the person in the intermediate place. In this way, Christian and Islamic ritual acts were different, each fitting with their religion’s distinct eschatology.

While Islamic \textit{ziyara} prayers were common at the graves of both saints and ordinary individuals, they were private prayers and not supposed to be delivered publicly. The prayers pious Muslims performed throughout the day could not be undertaken in cemeteries. These rules are noted in several \textit{hadith}, including the well-known tradition, “May God fight against the Jews and the Christians, because they took the tombs of their prophets as places of prayer.”\textsuperscript{593} Many Muslims believed that Christian [and Jewish] practices of venerating deceased individuals that were common during the formative period of Islam constituted praying to the deceased, rather than to God. This would be a strong violation of the Islamic faith. In Islam, prayers could only be directed toward Mecca and never toward a tomb, a prohibition that included even the tomb of the Prophet.\textsuperscript{594} Nevertheless, sources suggest the presence of tomb-mosques (mausolea with \textit{maharib} inside, presumably for the practice of prayer), from the earliest periods of Islam.\textsuperscript{595}

\textsuperscript{592} Schöller, \textit{The Living and the Dead in Islam}, 135.
\textsuperscript{593} Schöller, \textit{The Living and the Dead in Islam}, 240.
\textsuperscript{594} Schöller, \textit{The Living and the Dead in Islam}, 246.
\textsuperscript{595} Schöller, \textit{The Living and the Dead in Islam}, 247.
While many Sunni jurists argued strongly against such structures, by the thirteenth century, most softened their attitudes, probably because the practice had become so common.

The Shafi (a school of Islamic law) jurist Abd Allah al-Baydawi (d. 1286) wrote:

After the Jews and Christians used to prostrate before the tombs of the prophets, thus exalting their rank, and made them a direction of prayer towards which they turned, thus taking them as idols, the Prophet cursed them and prohibited the Muslims from doing the same. However, if a place of prayer is established in the vicinity or a righteous person with the aim of receiving blessing from being near to him, without the intention to exalt him or to pray to him, then such practice does not fall under the aforementioned verdict.\(^{596}\)

Al-Baydawi argues that the presence of tomb-mosques is permissible if visitors aim only to receive *baraka* from the deceased and not to pray to him or her, since prayers can only be directed to God. He thus judges permissible customs that were by this point very common in both Sunni and Shi’i practice.

Nonetheless, according to textual sources, Sunni adherents continued to perform practices at graves that jurists deemed improper. The jurisconsult and theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292-1350) railed against a *ziyara* guide, *Rules for Making Pilgrimage to Shrines*, which may have been of Shi’i origin.\(^{597}\) The problematic practices that al-Jawziyya describes include the following:

They place their faces upon the tomb, kiss the ground, bare their heads and their voices become raised in a clamour. They cry almost weeping. They see themselves having received greater benefit than the pilgrims to Mecca. They seek the aid of one who does

\(^{596}\) Translation from Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam*, 247.

\(^{597}\) The suggestion that the text may have been Shi’i comes from the fact that several of the practices apparently mentioned in the work are done in contemporary Shi’i visitation. Joseph W. Meri, “The Etiquette of Devotion in the Islamic Cult of Saints,” in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, 263-286, eds. Paul Antony Hayward and James Howard-Johnston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 278 n30.
not grant it the first time or the second. They call out but from a distant place. In approaching it, they pray two rak‘as [the primary bodily movements undertaken during daily prayers] near the tomb and believe that they have obtained recompense—not the recompense of the one who prays toward the two giblas [that is, towards Mecca and Jerusalem]. You see them prostrating, bending themselves, and seeking favour and satisfaction from the dead [only to fill their hands] with disappointment and loss: To other than God, rather to Satan—their tears flow there, their voices rise. The deceased is called upon to fulfil needs, to dispel sorrows, make the indigent free of want, to relieve the diseased and afflicted. After that they turn to circumambulating around the grave in imitation of the Bayt al-Haram [that is, the Ka‘ba] which God had made holy and guidance unto the inhabitants of the world. Then they begin to kiss [it] and touch it. Did you not see the Black Stone and what those visiting the Bayt al-Haram do with it? Then they soil their foreheads and cheeks near it which God knows are not soiled thus before it in prostration. Then they conclude the rites of the pilgrimage to the grave with shortening and shaving their hair there. They take pleasure in their share from that idol since they do not have a share with God. They offer up sacrifices to that idol. Their prayers, ceremonies and sacrifices were to other than God, the Lord of the inhabitants of the world.  

Al-Jawziyya appears to find these practices particularly problematic because they mimic the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and ritual prayers directed toward Mecca, but are directed toward a tomb. Following the concerns noted in the previous paragraph, this would be blasphemous. Regardless of whether Rules for Making Pilgrimage to Shrines was of Shi‘i origin, Al-Jawziyya’s deep concern about such practices suggests that at least some Sunni Muslims were undertaking them.

Other Sunni theologians described ziyara practices they deemed appropriate. The Persian polymath al-Ghazali (1058-1111) echoed other Sunni thinkers in arguing that ziyara practices should not imitate official Islamic prayers, which are directed toward Mecca. Instead, he...
believed that visitors should have their back to the *qibla* and refrain from kissing or touching tombs. While he aims to distinguish *ziyara* practices from official prayer, al-Ghazali suggests that *ziyara* take place on a Friday, associating it with the communal Friday prayers and thus legitimizing it.

While some Shi’i jurists opposed the construction of tomb-mosques, many found them permissible and even desirable, especially for the burials of imams. Tomb-mosques were common in the Qarafa cemetery in Cairo. For example, the Mashhad of Yahya l-Sabih, (built in the reign of the Fatimid Caliph al-Fa’iz, 1154–1160), features a domed burial chamber surrounded on three sides by lateral galleries, a design that may have been employed in the Fatimid mausolea of Qasim Abu Tayyib and Umm Kulthum, also in the Qarafa. The southeast gallery (which includes the *qibla*) features three *maharib*, the central one the largest, with a small dome over the central *mihrab*, an architectural aspect that appears to be unique to this monument. The central *mihrab* features beams emanating from a central medallion, giving a scalloped appearance reminiscent of pre-Islamic shell motifs on Christian funerary stelae and, crucially, *mihrab* images. While the design of the medallion appears to be geometric in nature, Williams believes it was originally stylized calligraphy of the intersecting words, “Muhammad” and “Ali,” as on the main *mihrab* of the tomb of Sayyida Ruqayya (1133) and the left niche of the al-Aqmar mosque (1125). Though in an ambulatory space adjoining the burial chamber, the central *mihrab* is clearly visible from the main space, composing as a single tableau.

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Columns frame the *mihrab*, its scalloped semidome appearing at level with the floriated capitals (*Figure 112*). From the viewpoint of the central chamber, the *mihrab* appears strikingly similar to many of the *mihrab*-image tombstones in the Islamic Museum. The central burial chamber includes the cenotaphs of Yahya al-Sabih and members of his family. Their ninth-century stelae (the *mashhad* was built in the mid-twelfth century over ninth-century graves) are embedded into the sides of the cenotaphs. They are simple in design, showing rectangles with long calligraphic inscriptions as the only design element. Yusuf Ragib notes that the lateral galleries facilitated *ziyara*, as they assisted in the practice of circumambulation, which Al-Jawziyya noted was described in *Rules for Making Pilgrimage to Shrines*. The presence of the *maharib* in the southeast gallery meant that it was not directly in the burial chamber, perhaps assuaging concerns about prayer in the same space as burials. In any case, the presence of *maharib* in the mausoleum indicates that the builders envisaged the space as a locus of prayer.

*Mihrab*-images, as opposed to *maharib*, were not necessarily intended to function as places of prayer. Khoury notes that a *mihrab*-image in the Mausoleum of Princess Tatar al-Higaziyya in Cairo (1347) is placed in an underground crypt, where it could not be accessed by visitors. Indeed, the orientation of *mihrab* images on tombstones suggests that many of them could not have functioned as orientation markers for prayer, because they did not face Mecca. As tombstones, they were arranged around the burial. In medieval Islamic practice, several types of

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605 It should be noted, however, that two burials remain in front of the lateral mihrrabs, though these do not have stelae and can therefore not be precisely dated. Other burials may have existed in the past. Ragib, “Les sanctuaires des gens de la famille dans la cité des morts au Caire,” 70.
606 Christel Kessler, “Funerary Architecture within the City,” *Colloque international sur l'histoire du Caire* (Cairo: Ministry of Culture of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 1972), 257-258.
exterior graves existed. Tombstones could be embedded into the sides of cenotaphs (as seen in the Mashhad of Yahya l-Sabih) or in the walls of mausolea. As seen in manuscript images and the medieval cemetery at Aswan, a common configuration was an exterior oblong cenotaph in the direction of the body, with tombstones at the head and foot of the deceased. A particularly well-preserved image of the grave survives in a manuscript of the *Maqamat al-Hariri* in the Louvre. Behind two figures carrying a shrouded body through a cemetery stand cenotaphs, including one with a tombstone that may feature a *mihrab*-image. While the legs of the deceased block the perspective, it appears that the tombstone, which faces the viewer, is at the head of the cenotaph, with another stone at the feet.

As a matter of convention, Muslims were buried on their right sides, their faces toward Mecca. This means that, when at the head of a cenotaph like in the *Maqamat* image, tombstones were perpendicular to the *qibla*. The position of the deceased in the grave allowed them to be in a perpetual position of prayer. Islamic graves, then, were loci of prayer, both for the deceased and for their visitors undertaking *ziyara*. While the *mihrab* images on tombstones were not intended to serve as orientations toward Mecca for official prayer, they mark the site as a place in which prayer occurs. While not pointing toward Mecca, tombstones with *mihrab*-images recall *maharib* and situate the grave in a sacred cosmos oriented around the Holy City. The concept of supplicatory prayer toward an intermediary is emphasized. The grave itself was not the holy place worthy of its own veneration, the deceased was not the object of devotion; rather both were secondary elements in a larger sacred system.

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The Development of Christian Tombstones in the Period after the Islamic Conquest

Unlike Islamic tombstones from Egypt, few Christian tombstones can be definitively dated, because it was not common practice to include the date of the death in the epitaph. Although thousands of Christian tombstones from late antique and medieval Egypt remain, only a small number record precise dates. Furthermore, the majority of Christian tombstones lacks firm archaeological context, having been removed from findspots without care in documentation. As a result, most Christian examples are placed within wide chronological ranges (sometimes several hundred years) based on their epigraphic features, artistic style, and possible provenience. Furthermore, scholars believe that the vast majority of medieval Christian tombstones from Egypt comes from the period prior to the Islamic Conquest of the 640s, or at the latest, just after. It is impossible to determine if this is the result of accidents of preservation or because of an actual drop in the Christian population due to conversions. Whereas the majority of extant Islamic stelae from Egypt likely came from two cemeteries, at Fustat and Aswan, scholars agree that the Christian examples probably came from over a dozen sites throughout Egypt, with thousands of additional examples preserved from various sites in Nubia. In most cases, the exact proveniences of the Egyptian tombstones are unknown, though scholars such as Bianca Tudor have attempted to reconstruct them. Because of the nature of the corpus of late antique Christian tombstones from Egypt, statistical analysis about stylistic and iconographic changes over time is not as feasible or fruitful as it is for the Islamic examples. However, a brief look at stelae from the post-Conquest period suggests some trends in artistic composition and iconography that might be employed as guidelines for dating.

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609 Tudor, *Christian Funerary Stelae*, Tables E and F.
610 Tudor, *Christian Funerary Stelae*. 

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Using the information in Bianca Tudor’s work as a guide and adopting the dates she proposes, I have created a database of extant tombstones dated to the years 700 to 1300.\textsuperscript{611} The 42 examples show stylistic trends suggesting that in the centuries following the Islamic conquest of Egypt, Christians assimilated the iconographical and compositional features of their tombstones to Islamic examples. The vast majority of tombstones of the post-conquest period is heavily text-based, with long inscriptions and little other decoration. For example, a stela in the British Museum, which may have come from Bawit in the western desert, is a simple rectangle filled with neat Coptic script (Figure 113). A thick border with a lozenge pattern surrounds the inscription. An example dated by inscription to 1092 in Madrid is even simpler, just a rectangle of Coptic script surrounded by an unadorned raised border (Figure 114). The lack of figural decoration suggests conformity to Islamic models.

When non-ornamental iconography is present, it is always in the form of a distinctly Christian symbol, typically the Cross. A limestone tombstone in the Louvre from Esna in Upper Egypt and dated by inscription to 983 is similar to the British Museum example in its rectangular form, ornamental border, and center filled with a long Coptic epitaph (Figure 115). In the midst of the inscription, however, there is a small, intricately carved cross. The tombstone is also distinguished by ornamental designs that sit on the top and bottom border. A small group of tombstones survives that are wooden and in the shape of a cross. It is possible that wooden tombstones were more prevalent in late antiquity and the medieval period, for both Christian and Muslim burials, but that many did not survive due to the fragile nature of the material. As with the stone rectangles, the surfaces of these objects are covered with long epitaphs.

\textsuperscript{611} Tudor, \textit{Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab Periods in Egypt}. 206
What we do not find in these later tombstones are the highly decorative examples with figural motifs known from the pre-Islamic period. Even a colonnade stela from Qasr Ibrim (in Lower Nubia, near the frontier with Egypt) imitates Islamic *mihrab* images in its lack of figural decoration (*Figure 116*). Whereas the earlier Christian colonnade stelae often featured figural imagery within the arch, this example, dated from the eleventh to twelfth century based on well-documented archaeological provenience, has a long Greek inscription beneath its scalloped architrave. Tombstones with text as the primary feature do exist in the pre-Conquest period, but they were not the only type. Though the corpus of examples is too small to support a definitive argument, the evidence suggests that a priority for visually foregrounding text developed in the period following the Islamic conquest and first major period of conversion to Islam. When Christians visited the graves of their deceased community members, they looked at tombstones that assimilated to conventions of art in the wider Islamicate society, while still maintaining elements that made feasible Christian visitation practices and beliefs about the afterlife.

As noted above, the vast majority of Islamic tombstones from medieval Egypt show simple rectangles, usually vertical, and often with border elements, both ornamented and of straight lines surrounding the text. These popular designs in Islamic tombstones were not merely the result a rejection of figural art in religious spaces but were indeed related to Islamic doctrine and artistic convention. The emphasis on long inscriptions with decorative calligraphy is deeply related to the importance of script in Islam. Arabic script, especially as conveyed through the Qur’an, was seen to be a defining feature of the religion because the Qur’an was understood as divine revelation delivered in Arabic by the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Therefore, Arabic calligraphy became a primary decorative feature on Islamic portable and monumental art in all media.
The rectangular shape and vertical orientation of most Islamic tombstones reflect medieval Islamic eschatology. As Małgorzata Redlak notes, Islamic doctrine held that at the Last Judgment, individuals would receive a tablet in a vertical rectangle containing a record of their deeds. Depending on the individual’s piety, their tablet would be either fastened to their chest, in front of their eyes, or, for the condemned, hung on their back. The vertical rectangle also recalls the pages of the earliest Qur’ans. While a horizontal page format became popular in the ninth century, lasting through the eleventh century, this earlier vertical book format may have influenced the initial conventions of tombstone forms. Interestingly, in the Islamic Museum of Cairo tombstone collection, the ninth century marks the start of the use of horizontal rectangular tombstones, which remain the minority of examples but are nonetheless in consistent use until the year 1000. Perhaps the new book format inspired a subset of artisans to create horizontal tombstones. Given the primacy of the Qur’an within Islam, the evocation of a book format could have been a means of communicating the sacred character of the tombstone to the deceased in the tomb and the visitor undertaking ziyara.

Elizabeth S. Bolman, William Lyster, and Lucy-Anne Hunt have shown that in the medieval period, Christian artisans in Egypt embraced Islamic conventions such as non-figural ornamentation and the use of decorative script. The tombstones’ emphases on script, non-figural designs, and even, in many cases, vertical rectangular shapes may be part of the same gradual artistic conformity to Islamic forms. Like the examples in Christian churches discussed

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613 Redlak, “Ornaments on Funerary Stelae of the 9th-12th Centuries from Egypt,” 562.
by Bolman, Lyster, and Hunt, the tombstones still allowed for the practice of Christian ritual, but assimilated to Islamicate customs. In this way, Coptic Christians translated models from Islamic culture in order to express their unique beliefs and identity. This phenomenon recalls how some Muslims translated the Christian prototype of the colonnade stela to fit their religious traditions and visitation practices in the late antique period.

Epitaphs

Despite this assimilation to tombstones with style and iconography that derived from Islamic practice, the Coptic tombstones stay emphatically true to their confessional identity in their inscriptions. While in the period after 1000, most Copts spoke Arabic, and Arabic was even employed in religious texts, the epitaphs on their tombstones are almost always in Coptic or Greek, rather than Arabic. The first Christian sepulchral inscription in Greek dates from 408, and epitaphs in this language continue in Egypt until the late ninth century. Coptic epitaphs appear in the seventh century, and the last absolutely dated stelae with a Coptic epitaph dates to 1397. Systems of dating also differ, with Christian tombstones always listing dates in the year of the martyrs (also known as the era of Diocletian, beginning in 284), while Islamic tombstones use the hijri year (the current era of the Islamic calendar, beginning in 622).

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615 There are, however, exceptions to these linguistic trends, including a Copto-Arabic stela that may have come from Nubia. The Arabic inscription is, however, preceded by three lines of Coptic text. Furthermore, the dating system employed in the epitaph matches Christian examples. On this stela, see Werner Diem, *The Living and the Dead in Islam. Studies in Arabic Epitaphs. I Epitaphs as Texts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), 556 and Ét. Combe, J. Sauvage and G. Wiet, eds., *Répertoire Chronologique d'Epigraphie Arabe: Tome Troisième* (Le Caire: Publications de V Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1932), no. 884.
616 In addition, a now-destroyed partial inscription with a funerary character, which may have been Christian, is dated to the year 148. Tudor, *Christian Funerary Stelae*, 138.
617 Tudor, *Christian Funerary Stelae*, 139.
In addition to the linguistic and temporal differences between Christian and Islamic stelae, the content of the inscriptions differs dramatically. Epitaphs on Christian tombstones are largely formulaic, with variations occurring depending on locale and time period.\textsuperscript{618} Tudor notes that inscriptions are almost always arranged in “a well-structured sequence of formulaic patterns.”\textsuperscript{619} She argues that, whether in Greek or in Coptic, these formulae include the following components:

1) An “acclamation formula” for God such as, “Jesus Christ is God” or invocations of Christ, the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, and/or intercessors.

2) A “commemoration or dedication formula” such as, “stela of NN [the name of the deceased].”

3) An “Appeal, liturgical, wish, or salutation formula” addressed to visitors or the deceased, such as “may the one who reads the epitaph bring them vows!” or “pray for me so that God has mercy on me!”

4) A “prayer formula” such as “God, give rest to the soul of blessed NN!”

5) A “death formula” such as “went to sleep.”\textsuperscript{620}

However, epitaphs do not always contain all five components. The precise formulae and their arrangement tend to follow regional conventions and can also vary by date, since each cemetery was used during a specific date range.\textsuperscript{621} For this reason, formulae are sometimes helpful in situating stelae geographically and chronologically.

Most examples have an opening formula, which is either an “acclamation formula,” a “commemoration or dedication formula,” or an “appeal, liturgical, wish, or salutation formula,”

\textsuperscript{618} Tudor, \textit{Christian Funerary Stelae}, 139.
\textsuperscript{619} Tudor, \textit{Christian Funerary Stelae}, 139.
\textsuperscript{620} Tudor, \textit{Christian Funerary Stelae}, 139-140.
\textsuperscript{621} Tudor, \textit{Christian Funerary Stelae}, 140.
This is followed by a “prayer formula” and a “death formula.”

A tombstone from Latopolis (Esna) in Upper Egypt dated to 1021/2 provides an example. Its Coptic-language epitaph reads:

With God [salutation formula]. Fell asleep in Christ [death formula]. Jesus the deceased Helene the child of the deceased Petros [commemoration formula]. The deacon and oikousmos of St. John’s in the city. Lanton on the day of cold (?)... (year) from the Holy Martyrs 738, of the Saracen 412. May the God of the Spirits and the Lord of All Flesh give repose to the soul of Thy servant and the soul of her father in the Place of Rest [prayer formula]. Amen.

Per the formulae discussed by Tudor, the epitaph begins with a salutation formula (“with God”), then has a death formula (“fell asleep...”), the name of the deceased and her filiation, the day of her death, and a prayer formula (“May the God of the Spirits and the Lord of All Flesh give repose...”).

Another example organizes the formulae in a different manner. The Coptic-language epitaph of this example, from Abydos in Upper Egypt, reads:

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622 Tudor, Christian Funerary Stelae, 140.
623 Cyril, Christian Funerary Stelae, Table F.
624 Hall, Coptic and Greek Texts of the Christian Period from Ostraka, Stelae, etc. in the British Museum (London: British Museum, 1905), 7, pl 7.
The Holy Trinity [in Greek] [acclamation formula]
In this place the body lies of the deceased Apa Theodoros, of blessed memory, son of the deceased Moses, presbyter of Tpolybiane [commemoration formula], who went to rest on the 2nd of Phamenoth, in the year of Diocletian 655 [death formula]. May God rest his soul and lay him in the bosom of Abraham Isaac and Jacob and make him worthy to hear the merciful and compassionate voice (saying:) come ye blessed of my father, and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the establishment of the world [prayer formula]. Yea Christ! [salutation formula] Amen. So be it!625

This inscription begins with an acclamation for the Holy Trinity (“The Holy Trinity”), and has a commemoration formula (“Here lies the (mortal) shell…”) followed by the name and a death formula (“He went to sleep…”), the date, and prayer formula (“May God give salvation to his soul…”) and another salutation formula (Christ!). It ends with the conventional “Amen. So be it.”626

625 Η ἀπα τριάς εἰκών εἰσαὶ
Μπείνα Νῆι πεκχνωώμα
Μπα πεηρ πηεεγε ετώνωγη
Πνακαρίος ἀπα θεοδώρος πύη
Ρε Μπακαρίος μαγγής πεπρες
Βατερος προι πτολυβίανη ιταφ
Ιτον δε Μγγος φαμενώε Με
Νος Β απο διοκλητιανού ΧΝΕ
Ερπνοργε ι ιτον ιτεωνωχη
Νεωνωχι εκουνη νουβάδη
Μμ ισακ ιη ιακωβ ιεωαδη
Νμπομ ιοωτν ετεκμη
Ετης Νμα ιη Μπτώανη
Ετη δε Αμπειντ ιετσπα
Χάτ ντε Ναειων ιετσπ
Κληρονομει ιετντερο ιταγ
Σβτωτς νιτυ διν τκάταβλη
Μπκοχος αίο πεξ υμην
Εκεμππε

626 Tudor, Christian Funerary Stelae, Table F.
Shorter epitaphs, many of which are earlier in date, include fewer formulae. A sixth-seventh century example of unknown provenience in the Metropolitan Museum of Art reads:

Oh God [acclimation formula]! Give all rest to the soul [prayer formula] of the blessed Apa Kyrillos the priest of Saint Kyros: he entered into rest [death formula] the twenty-sixth (day) of Thoout of the 7th Indiction.

The Coptic-language epitaph begins with an acclimation formula (“Oh God!”), followed by a prayer formula (give all rest…), a death formula (he entered into rest…) and the date of death.

Epitaphs in Greek include the same types of formulae and are overall very similar to the Coptic examples. A stela from the Fayum that likely dates to the sixth or seventh century has an epitaph that reads:

O Lord, give rest to the soul [prayer formula]; peace to the soul of Thenes [commemoration formula] (who died) Thoth 1 of the 3rd Indiction.

This inscription begins with a prayer formula (give rest…), followed by the commemoration formula providing the name of the deceased and the date of death.

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627 ΠΝΟΥΣΕ ΕΚΕ
ΤΗΜΩΝ ΝΗΜ Ε
ΤΕΨΥΧΗ Ν
ΠΝΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ
ΑΠΑ ΚΥΡΙΛΛΟΣ
ΠΕ ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ ΝΦΑ
ΠΙΟΣ ΑΒΒΑ ΚΥΡΟΣ
ΝΤΑΨΥΜΩΝ ΝΜΟΠ
ΝΚΟΥΧΟΥΤΑΧ
ΝΘΟΟΥΤ ΝΩΕΒ
ΔΟΜΗ ΙΝΑ
Hall, Coptic and Greek Texts of the Christian Period, 5, pl 5.

628 ὁ +Κ(υρίο)ον ἀνάπα-
υσον τὴν ψυχ-
ὴν· εἰρήν· Θένων· Θωθ α´· i-
ν· {δικτίονςς} ψ´·+
Christian epitaphs following these formulae emphasized Christian religious practices and beliefs about the afterlife. “Acclamation formulae” emphasize beliefs in the power of Christ and the saints to look after both the deceased in the intermediate state and the living visitors to the grave. “Commemoration or dedication formulae” emphasize the importance of the deceased’s place in the community. “Invocation” and “prayer formulae,” on the other hand, relate more closely to visitation practices, as visitors would have read these prayers aloud, seeking assistance for the deceased in the afterlife. Finally, “death formulae” describe Christian conceptions of the afterlife.

Islamic tombstones, on the other hand, diverge from Christian examples from the period of Islam’s arrival in Egypt (640s). Leor Halevi has discussed the evolution of Islamic epitaphs in Egypt in the process of Islamization. He defines Islamization as “the historical process at work during the formative era of Islam, by which persons and objects were made Islamic in character and became imbued with Islamic principles or forms.” Halevi notes that the earliest Islamic tombstone in Egypt dates to the year 652, just twenty years after the death of the Prophet. The Arabic epitaph reads:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, this grave belongs to ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Khayr al-Hajri. Forgive him, O God, and make him enter [Paradise] by your mercy, and let us go with him. Seek forgiveness for him whenever this inscription is read, and say ‘Amen!’ This inscription was written in Jumada II of the year 31

Halevi notes that the epitaph, while “Islamic” in its use of Arabic language, inclusion of the *bismillah*, and use of the *hijri* calendar system, lacks a patently Islamic character in the content

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of the inscription. By this, Halevi means that the inscription does not follow formulae that
developed later and came to define Islamic epitaphs. Instead, its prayer for forgiveness has strong
parallels to contemporary Christian and Jewish epitaphs. Indeed, one can see that the epitaph
conforms in some respect to Tudor’s epitaph format for Egyptian Christian tombstones, a
characteristic that is in keeping with the early date of the tombstone and the fact that it was
produced in a period when Islam was still formulating its cultural practices in Egypt. The
inscription begins with an “acclamation formula” (“In the name of God…,” the *bismillah*) and
then contains a “commemoration formula” (“this grave belongs to…”). This is followed by a
“prayer formula” (“Forgive him…”) and an “invocation formula” (specifically, an appeal)
addressing visitors (“Seek forgiveness for him…”). Finally, the epitaph includes the date. While
the language, calendrical system, and inclusion of the *bismillah* identify the tombstone as
belonging to a Muslim, the organization of the formulae of the epitaph follow the pattern of pre-
Islamic tombstone formulae. If the language and calendrical system were different, and if the
*bismillah* did not feature so prominently, scholars may have identified this tombstone as
belonging to a Christian, rather than a Muslim.

Yet epitaphs for Muslims did not follow Christian precedent for long. Halevi notes that as
Muslims began to form unique traditions and identities in Egypt, they began to employ different
features in their epitaphs. Yet I note that the epitaphs continue to include the same type of
formulae evident in Christian epitaphs, though are organized in a uniquely Islamic fashion. From

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631 Halevi, “‘The Paradox of Islamization,’” 122.
632 Halevi discusses issues of identity and the person whose grave this tombstone marked. He notes,
“Arguably, although the earliest dated references to the term would appear only several decades after
‘Abd al-Rahman’s death, this epitaph commemorated the death of a ‘Muslim.’ Possibly, however, it
belonged to someone who self-identified as a ‘Muhajir’ (Emigrant) or a ‘Muamin’ (Believer) and was
identified by others (polemically) as a Son of Hagar. There is, in any case, no reason to assume a priori
that every Muslim’s epitaph was intended, in any deliberate way, as an ‘Islamic’ memorial.” Halevi, “The
Paradox of Islamization,” 122.
the eighth century, almost all medieval Islamic tombstones in Egypt had the following formulae and sequence:

1) They begin with the *bismillah* as a standard “acclamation formula” (which was also employed in the earliest Islamic tombstone in Egypt, as noted above).

2) This is followed by the *shahada* “prayer formula” (the Islamic “profession of faith”), although this is omitted on a number of tombstones, especially those of young children.

3) Verses from the Qur’an are next, providing another “prayer formula” and forming the main part of the epitaph.

4) In some cases, the phrase “here is the grave” comes next, designating that the grave is present. The term employed for “grave” is usually *qabr* (قبر).

5) A “commemoration formula” follows, including the name of the deceased and the name of his or her father and sometimes grandfather.

6) This is followed by the date of death.

7) There is often then an “invocation formula” with call to divine mercy, to make the grave more comfortable or pity the loneliness of the deceased.

8) Around the end of the eighth century, many epitaphs begin to include a maxim of mourning for the Prophet.

9) There is often an “invocation formula,” with a call to visitors to pray for the deceased.

9) Finally, following a custom elsewhere in the Islamic world, some epitaphs could include a few lines of poetry on the insignificance of life.633

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Halevi provides the epitaph of a tombstone in the Museum of Islamic Art as an example of this formulaic pattern. Its Arabic epitaph reads:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate,
This is what Rabioa ibn Maslama ibn Hunata al-Sadafi testified. He confessed that there is no God but Allah
Alone, who has no partner, and that Muhammad is his slave and messenger.
He sent him “with guidance and right judgment in order to triumph over all of religion,
[And he confessed] that the Garden is real and the Fire is real, “and that the Hour [of Judgment] is coming, no doubt about it, and that God shall resurrect those who are in the graves.”
He believed in God’s omnipotence—all of it, the good and the evil, according to it he lived and according to it he died, and according to it he will be resurrected alive, God willing.
O God, insinuate to him his proof, and fill with light his grave,
And may the abode of your pleasure be recognized between him and his Prophet.
[May] the mercies of God [be] upon him, and his forgiveness and satisfaction, he passed away on Sunday, with six nights left to Muharram [i.e., the twenty-fourth] of the Year 179 [April 19, 795].

The standardized nature of such epitaphs may have reflected conventions of their production. Engravers may have mass-produced several models, with the name and date of death added later. Further, the formulaic nature may have reflected religious ideals of medieval Islam, in which all Muslims were thought to be equal in death. The homogeneity of the epitaphs may also relate to growing standardization in visitation rituals. Halevi suggests that the use of Qur’anic inscriptions on tombstones relates to the growth in the recitation of the Qur’an during

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ziyara, a practice that, based on the tombstone record, he believes began in the late eighth century. The practice followed the belief that recitations from the Qur’an could assist the deceased during the intermediate state, helping them avoid tortures of the grave. This means that every time a visitor read a tombstone, they would theoretically comfort and relieve the deceased. Islamic epitaphs in Egypt, then, developed to convey distinct ideas about practices concerning the visitation of the dead, and beliefs about the afterlife, while also building from earlier Christian conventions for funerary monuments.

Conclusion

In the early Islamic era, some Islamic tombstones translated Christian models in both visual composition and iconography and the content (“referential function”) of their epitaphs. At the same time, many Muslims formulated uniquely “Islamic” tombstones, defined by formulaic epitaphs that followed ziyara practices and iconographic, stylistic, and compositional features that corresponded to Islamic beliefs about the afterlife. In this way, the newly formulated tombstones prescribed particularly Islamic “territorial,” “referential,” and, in many cases, “aesthetic” functions. In the period following the Islamic conquest of Egypt (640s), and particularly after the first few centuries of Islamic rule (up to the ninth century), when the Christian community of Egypt gradually became smaller and the Islamic one larger, Coptic Christians progressively adopted Islamic models for their burial art, often translating these prototypes to fit Christian visitation practices at graves and eschatological concepts. While, as I have demonstrated, the script of epitaphs became a primary decorative feature on post-conquest Christian tombstones, with figural and ornamental decoration taking a backseat to long blocks of

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638 Bierman, Writing Signs, 16-20.
text, the content of the inscriptions does not follow Islamic examples. In other words, Christians translated Islamic tombstones in their “aesthetic,” but not in their “territorial” or “referential” functions. Christians could have employed Islamic formulae for their epitaphs, substituting, for example, verses from the bible for those from the Qur’an. While specific examples did modify particular parts of epitaphs, for example, adapting the *bismillah* to reference the Trinity, Christian tombstones do not adapt the organization of formulae in Islamic epitaphs wholesale. They instead remained true to the thousand-year tradition of Christian epitaphs in Greek and Coptic, albeit often using extended phrasing. The presence of longer inscriptions is consistent with the cross-religious interest in the aesthetic function text as a visual form, which originally derived from the importance of the written word in Islam. This type of translation, then, appears to be a means of creating compositional and iconographical (i.e., “aesthetic”) emulation, rather than an emulation of textual content (the “referential” function of text). Both Christians and Muslims engaged with the artistic traditions of neighbors of different religions. In the case of grave markers, however, traditions necessitated that epitaphs remained in the conventional religious language of a given spiritual community and communicated content that evoked distinct religious texts, beliefs about the afterlife, and visitation practices.
CONCLUSION

Burial Objects as Artistic Choice in a Diverse Society

The tenth-century History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria was initially compiled by the Coptic bishop and historian Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 987) on the basis of earlier sources. Part one of this compendium of information about leaders of the Coptic Church discusses at length the death and burial of the asserted first Coptic patriarch, St. Mark (c. 12-68 CE). The saint was a martyr who was imprisoned by pagans for his Christian beliefs and evangelism. The non-believers dragged him through the streets of Alexandria until St. Mark thanked Christ and said, “I render my spirit into thy hands, O my God!” and subsequently “gave up the ghost.” After his death, the pagan attackers attempted to incinerate the corpse, but God would not allow it. God created a mist and wind so dense that the earth shook, and sheets of rain poured upon the pyre.

Then the faithful brethren assembled, and took the body of the holy Saint Mark from the ashes; and nothing in it had been changed. And they carried it to the church in which they used to celebrate the Liturgy; and they enshrouded it, and prayed over it according to the established rites. And they dug a place for him, and buried his body there; that they might preserve his memory at all times with joy and supplication, and benediction, on account of the grace which the Lord Christ gave them by his means in the city of Alexandria. And they placed him in the eastern part of the church, on the day on which his martyrdom was accomplished (he being the first of the Galileans to be martyred for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in Alexandria), namely the last day of Barmudah according to the reckoning of the Egyptians, which is equivalent to the 8th day before the kalends of May among the months of the Romans, and the 24th of Nisan among the months of the Hebrews.  

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640 الإخوة المؤمنون أخذوا جسد مارمرفس من الرماد ولم يتغير فيه شيء ومضوا به إني البيعة التي كانوا يقدسون فيها وكشفوه وصلوا عليه كما جرت العادة وحفروا وصحروا له موضعًا ودفونوا جسده فيه ليتموا تذكاره في كل وقت بفرح وابتهال وبركة لأجل النعمة.
The passage in *The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* emphasizes several important aspects of the Coptic Christian death rite; put to paper some 900 years after the death of St. Mark, I propose the text says more about medieval Coptic rituals than those of the first century. It makes clear that Christians considered a burial, not cremation, permissible. The intact body of Mark was both a miraculous testament to his sanctity and an indication the importance of the body remaining intact for burial. That the nascent Christian community gathered the body and brought it to the church emphasizes the importance of community. The funerary rituals included material offerings and ceremonial acts such as shrouding the deceased and praying over him. St. Mark was laid to rest in the eastern part of the church, the apse, where the holiest rites—including partaking of the Eucharist—were observed. The location of his grave emphasized both his status as a holy figure and the importance of marking a burial in an emphatically Christian way. Notably, these funerary rites, according to the text, were already established at the time of Mark’s death, although Christ had been crucified just decades before. This suggests the importance of longstanding tradition to medieval Coptic Christians of Egypt in the tenth century, when the text was recorded.

Several crucial aspects of death rites in Coptic thought at the time that the text was written down come into focus. Foremost is the centrality of the community to all of the actions, whether preparing the body for burial, undertaking the burial itself, or memorializing the deceased. Also important is the historical precedent, the longstanding tradition of these rites.

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التي ذفها لهم السيد المسيح علي بديه في مدة الإسكندرية وجعلوه في الشرق من البيعة في اليوم الذي تمت فيه شهادته وهو على من استشهد من الجليلين عاى السيد يسوع المسيح بالاسكندرية في أخربوم من برمودة المصريين وهو ثماني من قاطور مايمص من شهر الروم وهو أربعة وعشرون يوما من نيسان من شهر العبر. Severus, History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria Part 1, 147-148.
Both centrality of community and longstanding tradition emphasize the particularly Christian nature of Coptic death rites.

The *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* was composed at a noteworthy time in Coptic history, either in the waning years of Abbasid dominion in Egypt (750-mid-tenth century), when Egypt was directly ruled by the Ikhshidids (935-969), a local Islamic dynasty and former Abbasid client that had claimed independence from the caliphate, or the early years of the Fatimid Caliphate based in Cairo (969-1171). While the exact process and timeline through which Christians became a minority in Egypt is poorly understood, conversion rates from Christianity to Islam seem to have been high in the ninth to tenth centuries. Cultural assimilation was also prevalent. By this era, Arabic had become the language of daily life for Egyptian Christians, with Coptic reserved for liturgical use. Indeed, Severus is thought to have been the first Coptic theologian to write extensively in Arabic. As bishop of al-Ashmunayn (Hermopolis Magna) along the Nile River in Middle Egypt, Severus visited the Fatimid court, representing the Coptic Christians in theological debates with Islamic imams (spiritual leaders) and Jewish rabbis.

This complex and diverse cross-religious situation means that the material in *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*—even the passages that concern much earlier times—tell us quite a bit about the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the medieval period. Indeed, *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* may have finally been written down in an attempt to

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644 Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice*, 204.
emphasize the longstanding tradition of Christianity in Egypt, as opposed to the hegemonic religion of Islam. That the death rituals performed for St. Mark, the ancestral leader of the Coptic Church, are described in so much detail and that the text specifically notes that they are “established rites,” suggests the importance of such rituals as cultural and religious symbols of identity for medieval Coptic Christians. In the text, the death rites are strongly contrasted with pagan death practices—foremost, cremation—further suggesting that they are meant to be seen in opposition to those of another religious group.

Yet, as this dissertation has shown, in the medieval period a great deal of ecumenical interchange took place in burial contexts, with Christians often assimilating to Islamic practices. One could surmise that, in his detailed description of proper burial rites, Severus aims to combat such assimilation, arguing for a separatist approach. Yet the very fact that Severus wrote about Christian theology and history in Arabic suggests his openness to intra-societal assimilation, as long as cultural markers associated with Islam, such as the Arabic language, were adapted for Christian content. Like Severus, many Copts assimilated to Islamic cultural practices while adapting them to fit Christian concepts and beliefs. This cultural translation could take place through the use of almost identical objects in different contexts, as seen in the case of the Fatimid tiraz discussed in Chapter Three, which were employed in both the grave of a high-ranking ecclesiastic buried in the bishop’s cemetery in Qasr Ibrim, Lower Nubia, and the Muslim member of Fatimid regime in Istabl Antar, Fustat. But in the Christian grave, the textiles, together with Christian vestments, emphasized a fusion of religious, political, and economic prestige. In the Islamic grave, on the other hand, the tiraz highlighted prestige along with Shi’i religious piety and a hope to obtain baraka (blessing) from the caliph, whose name was inscribed on the textiles.
Coptic Christians could also adapt their material culture of burial more directly from Islamic prototypes. The Christian tiraz discussed in Chapter Four, textiles that follow the tiraz model but employ Coptic or Greek script instead of the traditional Arabic, are one such example. These textiles translate tiraz in more than the language of the inscription; their context, meaning, style, and iconography is translated as well. Irene Bierman has shown that official Fatimid text was defined in three ways: “territorial function” (the ways the text bound and defined communities), “referential function” (the content of the inscription), and “aesthetic function” (its style).\(^645\) Christian tiraz translates all three textual and material functions. The language was changed in order to affirm the wearer’s Christian identity. The content of the inscription was changed to emphasize membership in the Christian community or biblical texts that draw attention to Christian concepts about the afterlife. The textiles were also aesthetically transformed, with the styles of their iconography and text emphasizing difference from traditional Arabic-language tiraz.

In the case of grave markers discussed in Chapter Five, Coptic Christians adapted particular features of Islamic prototypes, but maintained some pre-Islamic elements. While the iconographic aspects of the visual composition were commonly transformed, the language of the epitaphs remained emphatically Christian, in Greek or Coptic. Furthermore, the organization and overall compositions of the epitaphs stayed true to pre-Islamic formulae. In the case of tombstones, then, the territorial and referential functions of the text—defining identity and communicating Christian principles, beliefs, and practices—remained of utmost importance, whereas the aesthetic function was considered permissible to be more clearly adapted to assimilate with Islamic forms.

Also considered improper to assimilate to their Islamic practice were the conceptions about the afterlife. Chapter One demonstrated that Coptic Christians created an iconography of salvation that portrayed continuity in the conceptions of time and space across the Christian world. Chapter Two shows that in images and texts portraying the sensorial aspects of the afterlife, however, Coptic Christians emphasized their unique beliefs rather than similarities with other sects. Whereas other Christian groups developed more materialist conceptions of the intermediate state, including the emerging doctrine of purgatory in the West, Copts continued to depict their own quasi-immaterial concept of this state. Of most importance to this dissertation, Coptic Christians emphatically rejected their Muslims neighbors’ concept of a materialist intermediate state in which souls returned to entombed bodies and had the ability to experience “tortures of the grave.” This difference in beliefs led to different meanings and uses of shared material culture.

We should think of medieval Coptic Christian funerary arts as embodying choices informed by tradition, belief, and society. Living in a diverse society, medieval Coptic Christians had available multiple artistic styles to employ for their arts, some drawn from their own traditions, others adopted, appropriated, and translated through intra-societal exchange. In the burial contexts discussed in this dissertation, Copts chose to adapt various artistic elements to fit their history, beliefs, and customs. They are an example of members of a non-hegemonic religion making dynamic choices to express their varied identities.
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