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## ANCIENT EGYPTIAN LEGACIES IN COPTIC PRACTICES

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### ABSTRACT

*Votive offerings, sacrificial rituals, tattoos, and an icon procession. There are many different legacies between Coptic and ancient Egyptian practices. This study aims to shed light on the origins of some current Coptic ritual practices and compare them to ancient Egypt by presenting some inherited rituals that have survived from ancient Egypt to the present day. The analytical documentation approach will be used with a tourism study to achieve the objectives of this thesis. The objectives of this thesis reveal that the Coptic legacies inherited from ancient Egypt contribute to understanding the cultural and historical heritage of Egypt and linking the past to the present, as these legacies reflect the overlap of the Ancient Egypt and Coptic civilizations, as these rituals continued through the ages, providing an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the social and religious development in Egypt.*

**KEYWORDS:** Coptic , legacies , heritage , Ancient Egypt .

### INTRODUCTION

Recalling the past and re-employing it in the present is one of the most important fundamental factors in group cohesion and identity, as peoples and nations have relied on it to shape their cultural identities .<sup>1</sup>

The study of the Egyptian civilization's cultural heritage in daily life is a comparison of one of the living aspects of people's affairs in ancient and contemporary Egypt, including social and religious customs and traditions, with the goal of preserving the cultural heritage left by the ancient ancestors, which has remained attached to the lives of the Egyptian people for thousands

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<sup>1</sup> تيسير محمود عيسى ، قرية بيت جبرين في الذاكرة الجماعية ، رسالة ماجستير ، جامعة بيرزيت ، فلسطين ، 2007 ، ص 2

of years and appears in many rituals and social practices Which appears in religious celebrations, as the ancient Egyptians.<sup>2</sup>

The inscriptions depict details of some of the festivals and rituals, beginning with the exit of the Pharaoh's procession and continuing with music, singers, and dancers until the celebration concludes with the offering and slaughtering of sacrifices.<sup>3</sup>

When Christianity entered Egypt, it transformed many of the ancient Egyptians' practices into practices that were consistent with the new religion or did not conflict with it, as many of the Egyptian cultural legacies accumulated over the ages.<sup>4</sup>

The Christian legacies are evident in the celebrations of the saints' feasts, which begin with honouring the saints through masses, vows of candles and incense, sacrifices, feeding the poor, and some popular manifestations such as tattooing for children and adults as a souvenir of the visit.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, the Coptic legacies are regarded as an integral part and living witness to a long history of religious and cultural interaction, dating back to Ancient Egypt and evolving with the spread of Christianity in the first century AD. This research will shed light on some of these legacies, which are represented in votive offerings and religious rituals for presenting them, honoring the gods and comparing it to honoring the bodies of saints, and tattooing in ancient Egyptian thought and its stages of development until Christianity. One of the most important inherited manifestations is the icon procession, which is similar to how the ancient Egyptians celebrated the Oracular gods.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

(a Documenting Egypt's religious and cultural history, allowing for a better understanding of its rich and diverse past.

(b) The study aims to shed light on how some of these ancient Egyptian legacies survived, merged, or developed under Coptic Christianity.

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<sup>2</sup> عصام ستاتي ، مقدمة في الفولكلور القبطي ، الهيئة العامة لقصور الثقافة ، القاهرة ، 2010 ، المقدمة  
<sup>3</sup> فاروق أحمد مصطفى ، الموالد ، دراسة العادات والتقاليد الشعبية في مصر ، ط.2 ، دراسات في المجتمع المصري ،  
الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب ، 1981 ، ص 79

<sup>4</sup> باروسلاف تشرنى ، الديانة المصرية القديمة ، ترجمة أحمد قدرى ، الطبعة الأولى ، القاهرة 1996 ، ص55

<sup>5</sup> أشرف أيوب ، الموالد القبطية ، مكتبة الأسكندرية ، 2015 ، ص 13

(c) Identify some Coptic legacies and their counterparts in ancient Egypt, as well as the extent to which Coptic rituals and holidays were influenced by ancient Egyptian culture and religion.

(d) shed light on how societies preserved some aspects of their cultural and religious heritage despite the change of religions and systems.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research employs an analytical documentary approach to achieve the study's objectives while clarifying some of the customs, traditions, rituals, and religious practices from ancient Egypt to Coptic Christian practices and rituals.

Ancient Egyptian legacies in Coptic practices are a living example of Egyptian civilization's continuity over time. Many Pharaonic elements were incorporated into the Coptic Christian identity. These legacies remain alive in modern Egyptian culture. Some features of the Pharaonic religion can be observed in Coptic religious rituals and celebrations.<sup>6</sup>

### **1- VOTIVE OFFERINGS**

#### **THE MEANING OF THE VOTIVE OFFERINGS**

While the term "votive," derived from the Latin *votum*, meaning "promise," is frequently used to describe Egyptian religious practice, such personal gifts to the gods appear to have been made in anticipation of blessings or to appease a deity, rather than in fulfilment of a vow after a prayer was answered.<sup>7</sup>

In ancient times, a votive offering was considered a gift to God. It was believed that anything dedicated by a mortal became property of a god.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of votive objects appear to have been created in temple workshops for cult purposes. The majority of the offerings are divided into three categories: representations of deities, temple cult objects, and objects associated with human fertility. Women and men alike dedicated votive objects to strengthen prayers or to maintain their participation in a divine cult.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Naguib, *Survivals of Pharaonic Religious Practices in Contemporary Coptic Christianity*. 2008, UEE.

<sup>7</sup> Pinch, Geraldine and Elizabeth A. Waraksa, 2009, *Votive Practices*. In Jacco Dieleman, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles. <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz001nfbgg.p2>

<sup>8</sup> Whitley, James. *The Archeology of Ancient Greece*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Pinch, Geraldine and Elizabeth A. Waraksa, *Votive Practices* ,p 1

In addition to the main deities, each city and town worshipped its own god. People prayed at home because temples did not have regular services. Bes, the dwarf god of childbirth, music, and dancing, was among the most popular deities worshipped in the home. He was worshipped by women of childbearing age and was considered a protector of children. Furthermore, amulets in the form of Bes were worn by both women and children in life for the latter's protection and the former's fertility.<sup>10</sup>

## STAGES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOTIVE OFFERINGS

### 1.A EARLY DYNASTIC AND OLD KINGDOM

votive offerings have been found in temple areas at Elephantine, Abydos, Hierakonpolis, and Tell Ibrahim Awad in the northeastern Delta as well as at a sacred hillside site at northwest Saqqara. the most common types of offering were human or animal figurines, miniature vessels, plaques, and amulets. Some object types, such as child figurines or model baboons.<sup>11</sup>



**Fig.1** votive Objects from Elephantine ,Hierakonpolis and Abydos  
(source: <https://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/votive.htm> access 12 Oct 2024 at 12:58 PM)

<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Booth, *In Bed with the Ancient Egyptians*, Amberley Publishing, 2015

<sup>11</sup> Pinch and Waraksa, *Votive Practices*, p 2

## **1.B MIDDLE KINGDOM**

The religious life of private individuals at this time may have centered on domestic shrines and funerary cults. Some votive offerings, such as female figurines, seem to have been left in the outer areas of non -royal tombs .<sup>12</sup>

fertility figurines (nude female figurines), amulets, and plaques have also been excavated in the vicinity of a simple Hathor-shrine setup at the mining site of Gebel Zeit on the Red Sea coast.<sup>13</sup>

## **1-C THE SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD:**

People represent themselves worship in divine images on votive stelae set up in sacred areas.



**Fig .2** Votive stela with ears

(source: <https://africame.factsanddetails.com/article/entry-143.html> ,  
access 12 Oct 2024 at 1:10 PM)

## **1-D NEW KINGDOM**

People visiting local temples and cemeteries. Some deities, including Amun-Ra, Hathor, Thoth and Ptah, acquired prayer-related epithets such as

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<sup>12</sup> Pinch Geraldine ,Votive offerings to Hathor. Oxford: Griffith Institute/Ashmolean Museum,1993,p218

<sup>13</sup>Pinch Geraldine , Votive offerings to Hathor ,p 218

“the one who hears petitions.” Accordingly, model ears—and stelae, plaques, and other objects showing ears—were dedicated to these deities.<sup>14</sup>



**Fig.3** New Kingdom , wooden votive ear. Unprovenanced. UC55155.  
(source : <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7kp4n7rk> access 12 Oct 2024 at 1:15 PM)



**Fig.4** New Kingdom faience fragment of a model naos sistrum with Hathor head design. Unprovenanced. UC35807. (source: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7kp4n7rk> access 12 Oct 2024 at 1:20PM)

<sup>14</sup> Morgan 2004; Enka Elvira, 2004 Untersuchungen zu den Ohrenstelen aus Deir el Medine. Ägypten und Altes Testament 61.

## **1-E IN THE LATE OF THE NEW KINGDOM AND THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD:**

other types of votive practices arose, such as writing prayers on temple walls or columns.<sup>15</sup> or carving “votive footprints” into temple pavements and roof blocks, presumably to keep the donor perpetually standing in the presence of the deity.<sup>16</sup>



**Fig .5** Late 18th Dynasty faience ear plaque with ears depicted in registers. Amarna. UC722. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7kp4n7rk> access 12 Oct 2024 at 1:25 PM.

## **2-VOTIVE OFFERINGS IN THE CHRISTIANITY**

Begging the saints' shrines and seeking their assistance, these pleas are usually accompanied by a vow, which is a phrase on a moral pledge made by the visitor to present this vow to the shrine in the form of fulfilling his desires that he requested from the saint. The tradition of presenting vows is as ancient as shrines. Perhaps it is an unconscious continuation of the person in pagan religions in the region who makes offerings to the gods to appease

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<sup>15</sup> SadekAshraf Iskander, Popular religion in Egypt during the New Kingdom. Hildesheimer ägyptologische Beiträge 27. Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1987, p 52 -58

<sup>16</sup> Jacquet-Gordon, Helen 2003 The graffiti on the Khonsu Temple roof at Karnak: A manifestation of personal piety. University of Chicago, Oriental Institute Publications 123. Chicago: The Oriental Institute. p.59-60

them. So we can say that the saints are the new gods.<sup>17</sup> Then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the Lord. (Deut 12:11). There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your **votive** offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. (Deut 12:6).

In the Old Testament, sacrifices or offerings are classified into five categories. Burnt offering, grain offering, peace offering, sin offering, and trespass offering. Each of these sacrifices used specific elements, such as animals or agricultural produce, and had a specific purpose. Most were split into two or three portions—God's portion, the portion for the Levites or priests, and, if there was a third, a portion kept by the person offering the sacrifice.<sup>18</sup>

## **2-A THE BURNT OFFERINGS**

The burnt offering is one of the oldest and most common offerings in history. It's entirely possible that Abel's offering in (Genesis 4:4), was a burnt offering, although the first recorded instance is in (Genesis 8:20) when Noah offers burnt offerings after the flood. God ordered Abraham to offer his son, Isaac, in a burnt offering in (Genesis 22), and then provided a ram as a replacement. After suffering through nine of the ten plagues, Pharaoh decided to let the people go from bondage in Egypt, but his refusal to allow the Israelites to take their livestock with them in order to offer burnt offerings brought about the final plague that led to the Israelites' delivery (Exodus 10:24-29).

## **2-B GRAIN OFFERINGS**

A grain offering could be given to God either uncooked or cooked in an oven or pan (Leviticus 2:1; 4—5). The requirements for the grain offering were that it had to be finely ground and have oil and salt in it (Leviticus 2:1, 4, 13). It could not have any yeast (also called leaven) or honey in it (Leviticus 2:11).

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<sup>17</sup> بلقاسم الطباي، الموت في مصر والشام (1250-1517). الجزء الثاني، طقوس الموت وعاداته في العهد المملوكي، الطبعة الاولى، الدار التونسية، 2014، ص 221

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Old-Testament-sacrifices.html>



**2-C PEACE OFFERINGS:** A peace offering in the Old Testament Law is described in (Leviticus 7:11–21). " These are the regulations for the peace offering anyone may present to the Lord:

**The First:** "If they offer it as an expression of thankfulness ". (Leviticus 7:11)

**The second:** "If, however, their offering is result of a vow or is a freewill offering ". (Leviticus 7:16).

**The third:"** And if anyone touches an unclean thing, whether human uncleanness or an unclean beast or any unclean detestable creature, and then eats some flesh from the sacrifice of the LORD's peace offerings, that person shall be cut off from his people." (Leviticus 7:21) .

## **2-D THE SIN OFFERINGS**

"The Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron and his sons: " these are the regulations for the sin offering: The sin offering is to be slaughtered before the Lord in the place the burnet offering is slaughtered it is most holy . ( Leviticus 6:24-30: 8:14–17; 16:3–22).

## **2-C TRESPASS OFFERINGS**

The trespass offering was given as atonement for unintentional sins that required reimbursement to an offended party, and also as a cleansing from defiling sins or physical maladies. (Leviticus 5:14–19; 6:1–7; 7:1–6).

## **3- IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

And while some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, He said,(Luke 21:5 ).One of the most popular votive offerings. A votive candle, also known as a prayer candle, is a small candle made of white or yellow beeswax that is intended to be burned during Christian prayer.<sup>19</sup> Votive candles are commonly found in many churches and on home altars in Christianity, and they represent "prayers made by the worshipper for himself or for others." <sup>20</sup>

## **4- RITUAL OFFERINGS IN RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES**

In Christianity, the altar is decorated with covers and candles before the celebration begins, and the offerings must be properly prepared according to the laws. One of the laws of the celebration is that non-Christians and non-baptized people leave the celebration area before offering sacrifices and

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<sup>19</sup> Geddes, Gordon; Griffiths, Jane ,Christian Belief and Practice. Heinemann.2002 p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> O'Toole, James M. Habits of Devotion. Cornell University Press. 1 July 2005. p. 128.

sanctifying the offerings. The celebration begins by ringing bells, playing musical instruments, or reading a message from the holy Bible. <sup>21</sup>

A general meaning of the term "relics" of saints: RELIQUIAE originally meant that any relic in Greek and classical Latin came from the remains of the dead. However, with time, it took on a religious meaning, as the Church assigned this word to the remains of the saints and what pertains to them, such as the bodies and tools that the saint used during his earthly life, and all that remains of the tools that he suffered with and led to his martyrdom. <sup>22</sup> This is not an order, but a custom of the Jews, and it took place with the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it continued with the bodies of Christians, and currently it is only preserved in the bodies of the saints. "And when the Saturday was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him." (Mark 16:1).

"So, they returned and prepared spices. And on the Saturday, they rested, according to the commandment." (Luk 23:56). "Then, on the first day of the week, early in the morning, they came to the tomb, carrying the spices they had prepared and some people with them." (Luk 24:1).

"So they took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in shrouds with the spices, as the Jews usually shroud." (John 19:40).

## **5- HONOURING THE BODIES OF MARTYRS IN THE CHURCH TRADITION.**

Since the early Christian era (the beginnings of Christianity), the bodies of martyrs have been counted as sacred relics and precious masterpieces, and they are placed in the greatest and most sacred places, <sup>23</sup> similar to what came in (Revelation 6:9) "Under the altar, I saw the souls of those who were killed for the word of God and for the testimony that they had."

Since the early ages, the Church erected small structures containing the bodies of its martyrs, and these structures or churches were called "Martyrium," meaning "a place of testimony." The word "martyrdom" is a literal translation from the Greek Μαρτύριον, meaning "a small church for the memory of a martyr, The priest appointed at the altar of a martyr was considered higher in rank than any other priest and was called (Martyr Arius), meaning servant of martyrdom. <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> عادل تيودور خوري, لشعائر والطقوس الدينية - الظاهرة الدينية - الخامس, المكتبة البوليتية, 2018,

<sup>22</sup> <https://alkalema.net/taklid/rfat.htm>, Accessed 12 August 2024/3:06Pm

<sup>23</sup> القمص أنثاسيوس فهمي جورج , الأستشهاد في فكر الآباء ( علم المارتولوجي ) , الطبعة الثانية , 2019 , ص

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<sup>24</sup> القمص أنثاسيوس فهمي جورج , الأستشهاد في فكر الآباء ( علم المارتولوجي ) ص 159-160

Our church honors the bodies of the martyrs, imbues them with spices and performs spiritual ceremonies in the places where their bodies are housed .<sup>25</sup> The habit of preserving the remains of saints in the Egyptian Church coincides with another ritual, which is the ritual of anointing the remains, which takes place amidst prayers and celebrations, where the blessing is made, which is the material used in perfumery in a metal dish. among Christians. Then the priest paints the tube containing the remains.

#### **6- RITUAL OF OFFERINGS: (HEM-NETJER) "GOD'S SERVANT "**

Temples were considered to be homes for gods or kings. A priest's main job was to honor the deity or king.

Kings, or Pharaohs as they were called, were believed to be descendants of the gods. Each day the king or priest washed and dressed the statues dedicated to the gods and brought them food.<sup>26</sup>

The ancient Egyptians emphasized the promise of a better life in the afterlife. During the ancient period, it was believed that only kings would benefit from the afterlife, but by the Middle Period, Egyptians believed that the common people would also experience an afterlife .<sup>27</sup>

In ancient Egypt, the most common way to serve a god in a temple was to perform cultic offerings. There is a very striking parallel between how a god was treated and how the dead were treated.<sup>28</sup>

The god was given physical reality through their image, or statue, and was served by priests who washed and dressed the statue as if it were the god's own body. However, the god was also seen as requiring offerings, such as food and drink, which was an important aspect of the cult. The standard cult priest, – hm-ntr (hem-netjer), means "god's servant." <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> القمص أثناسيوس فهمي جورج, الأستشهاد في فكر الآباء ( علم المارتولوجي ) ص 161

<sup>26</sup> Delia Pemberton ,Ancient Egypt, published :nov,2007 ,p.121

<sup>27</sup> Delia Pemberton, Ancient Egypt,p.121

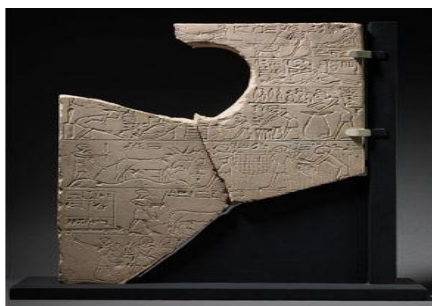
<sup>28</sup> Steven Snape , Ancient Egyptian Tombs: The Culture of Life and Death, Publisher:Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, West Sussex, 2011

<sup>29</sup> Steven Snape, Ancient Egypt,2011

## 7- ANIMALS OFFERINGS

Throughout the ancient Egyptian period, all edible mammals were butchered in the same manner, whether for human consumption, offerings to the gods, or offerings to the ancestor dead. The butchery scene is common in tomb decoration throughout the ancient Egyptian periods. Butchering animals started with the choice of the suitable one by specialists, who cared for and reared them in rooms attached to the temples till they obtained a suitable size.

<sup>30</sup>



**Fig .6**  
Model  
of a

Slaughter House . **Fig.7 Double-Sided Stela of the Priest Amenyseneb** (source:<https://egypt-museum.com/model-of-a-slaughter-house/> , access 12 Oct 2024 at 1:35 PM)

The slaughtering act could be performed for secular purposes during festivals, public events, and butchery shops, or for religious purposes as part of funerary ritual cults and its essential role in the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. Cattle butchery is one of the most common scenes in Egyptian art, first appearing in the late third or early fourth dynasties and continuing throughout Egyptian history. <sup>31</sup>

## IN CHRISTIANITY

During religious celebrations, people bring animals to be slaughtered by volunteers at a designated abattoir. The monastery has the right to take one-quarter of the meat, skin, and internal needs of the animal. The monastery sells it and distributes the remaining funds to the poor and the carcass' owners. <sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> J. ROSALIND and J. JACK, *Egyptian Household Animals*, Shire Egyptology 12, Aylesbury, 1989, p. 27-28.

<sup>31</sup> Maged Negm, *Slaughtering Technique of Mammals in Ancient Egypt*, p197

<sup>32</sup> الموالد والتصوف في مصر . نيكولاس بيخمان , ترجمة رؤوف مسعد , المركز القومي للترجمة , الطبعة الأولى , 2009 ص 35

## **8-TAKING CARE OF THE GODDESS STATUE INSIDE THE TEMPLE**

One of the pharaoh's most important responsibilities was to care for the gods, so the pharaohs constructed magnificent temples to honour the gods. They built a shrine in the centre of each temple's interior, and within the shrine, they kept a statue of the god for whom the temple was built.<sup>33</sup> A temple was thought to be the home of a god or goddess, and a statue inside the temple was considered his or her earthly form.<sup>34</sup> In Egypt, the pharaoh was thought of as the *neter nefer*, or good god. On earth, he was considered the chief priest of all temples and was in charge of carrying out religious rites. But since he couldn't preside over all the temples at once, the pharaoh selected priests and priestesses to serve the god.<sup>35</sup> The god may take the form of a living animal, a bird, or a solid gold statue. A statue was believed to contain the god's *Ka*, or spirit.<sup>36</sup>

## **9- PRIESTS' DUTY TO SERVE THE GODS.**

To do their work, priests and priestesses had to be ritually pure; they looked after god statues as if they were real living people, anointing them with oils, giving them food offerings, and dressing the statues in fine linens.<sup>37</sup> The priests said their prayers; it was believed the spells and the prayers were recited, the power of the god would come alive and enter the statues, and they burnt incense. The musicians in the outer area sang a morning song.<sup>38</sup> However, the general public was not permitted to enter the temple's main area, only the front courtyard. Only priests, priestesses, and royalty were allowed to enter the temple beyond the courtyard, as it was considered sacred ground.<sup>39</sup> Throughout the day, people brought offerings to the god, which the priest took into the sanctuary and presented to the god. After some time had passed, the priest concluded that the gods were full. Then the priests took food for themselves. In addition to his priestly duties, he planned and organized festivals to honor the god.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Eric H. Cline, Jill Rubalcaba, *The World in Ancient Times: The ancient Egyptian world*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 42.

<sup>34</sup> Nancy Ohlin, *Ancient Egypt*, Bonnier publishing, New York, 2016

<sup>35</sup> Christine Ronan, Mira Bartok, *Ancient Egypt and Nubia*, U.S.A, 1995, p 18

<sup>36</sup> Joanne Randolph, *Living and Working in Ancient Egypt*, Enslow publishing, NY, 2018. p25

<sup>37</sup> Christine Ronan, Mira Bartok, *Ancient Egypt and Nubia*, p 18

<sup>38</sup> Joanne Randolph, *Living and Working in Ancient Egypt*, p 25

<sup>39</sup> Christine Ronan, Mira Bartok, *Ancient Egypt and Nubia*, p 18

<sup>40</sup> Joanne Randolph *Living and Working in Ancient Egypt*, p 25

## 10 -TATTOO

The word 'tattoo' is derived from the Tahitian word *tatatau*, which means 'to strike properly' and was recorded by Captain Cook as 'tattow'.<sup>41</sup> Tattoo evidence in ancient Egypt and Nubia is scarce, and human remains provide no indication of the frequency of tattooing; because they are directly on the skin, they are usually either unprotected or hidden by bandages. The first concrete examples of Egyptian tattooing date back to the Middle Kingdom (c. 2000 BC), when several mummies of tattooed women were discovered in Deir El-Bahri. The signs are primarily made up of dots and dashes, which are often arranged in geometric patterns like lozenges and placed on the chest, abdomen, arms, and legs.<sup>42</sup>

According to Robert S. Bianchi, while there are no explicit mentions of tattooing in their preserved histories, the ancient Egyptians practiced tattooing during the Middle Kingdom period, as evidenced by excavated mummies. For example, the mummy of a woman named Amunet, who acted as a priestess for the goddess Hathor, had numerous tattoo designs consisting of abstract patterns of dots and dashes across her lower abdomen, thighs, and arms.<sup>43</sup>

Tattooing persisted in both Nubia and Egypt in the first millennium BCE, though Ptolemaic (332-30 BCE) tattoos were typically dotted patterns on the face and hands, with some on the wrists and arms. Tattooing persisted into the Coptic period, with religious symbols being tattooed on wrists and hands. One of the British Museum's mummies, who died 1,300 years ago, has the Archangel Michael symbol tattooed on her inner thighs.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hassan, J. P. H., Meldgaard, J. and Nordqvist, J. 1991. *The Greenland Mummies*. London: British Museum Press.

<sup>42</sup> Marie Vandenbeusch, Project Curator, Ancient Egypt and Sudan, *Tattoos in ancient Egypt and Sudan*, Publication date: 26 June 2014, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/tattoos-ancient-egypt-and-sudan>

<sup>43</sup> Lee Barron, *Tattoos and Popular Culture: Cultural Representations in Ink*, Northumbria University, UK, 1<sup>st</sup> ed, 2020, p. 10

<sup>44</sup> Lisa K. Sabbahy, *All Things Ancient Egypt: An Encyclopedia of the Ancient Egyptian World*, Vol 1, Santa Barbara, California, 2019, p 506



**Fig.8** A tattoo was discovered on the thigh of a Sudanese woman who died 1,300 years ago. This CT scan 3D visualization shows her mummified remains. (Image credit: © Trustees of the British Museum.)(source: <https://www.livescience.com/44403-christian-mummy-thigh-tattoo.html> , access 12 Oct 2024 at 2:29 pm )



**Fig .9** Infra-red reflectography of the tattoo found on the mummified remains of a Sudanese woman. (Image credit: © Trustees of the British Museum.)(source:<https://www.livescience.com/44403-christian-mummy-thigh-tattoo.html> , access 12 Oct 2024 at 2:29 pm)

The tattoo combines the Greek letters for Michael (MIXAHA) into a single symbol. The monogram is topped by a cross. The tattoo suggests that woman was of Christian faith, and she hoped to place herself under the protection of

the archangel Michael. Tattoos are still used today by Egypt's Coptic Christians , who often have a small tattoo inside their wrist .<sup>45</sup>

## **11- TATTOOING IN THE CHRISTIANITY**

The Old Testament contains a law prohibiting tattoos dating back to around 1500 BC: "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves." I am the Lord." ( Leviticus 19:28 ).Tattoos were an important part of the religious life of the early Coptic Christians in Egypt, and they were used to demonstrate confirmation and devotion to their religions by marking their bodies. For example, the tattoo of Saint George was created as a symbol of victory over Roman persecution. <sup>46</sup>After Egypt became a Roman province, particularly after the introduction of Christianity, Christians began to wear tattoos as a sign of their faith, just as Christians did in other parts of the Roman world. <sup>47</sup>Tattooing became much less common after the Arab conquest of Egypt in the seventh century, when the majority of the population converted to Islam and Muslims forbade tattooing. However, it persisted among Christians and eventually spread to rural areas. <sup>48</sup>Another legendary explanation is that the blue color of the tattoo reminds Christians of the scars they received when they were forced to carry heavy chains with a large iron cross at the end around their neck during the reign of the very eccentric Fatimid Caliph Al-Hakim ibn Amr Allah (996-1021 CE), thus leaving a bluish mark on the skin. <sup>49</sup>A little dark blue cross tattooed on the inside of someone's wrist. This tiny cross is a symbol of identity for millions of Coptic Christians in Egypt; it is a very old tradition, and many children are tattooed with the cross when they are about 2-3 years old, usually during Christian festivals (mulid). Both Egyptian Christian men and women have this tattoo .<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Peter Lacovara , The World of Ancient Egypt: A Daily Life Encyclopedia [2 volumes]: , Santa Barbara,California ,2017 ,p.194

<sup>46</sup> سوسن عامر ,الرسوم التعبيرية فى الفن الشعبى , الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب،1981،ص 39

<sup>47</sup> Margo DeMello, Inked: Tattoos and Body Art around the World, vol 1, santa Barbara ,California ,2014,p.184

<sup>48</sup>Margo DeMello, Tattoos and Body Art around the World, vol 1 ,p.184

<sup>49</sup> David Emmanuel Singh, Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts,1<sup>st</sup> edition ,2008,Regnum,p.121.

<sup>50</sup> David Emmanuel Singh, Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts,p.121



Tattooing is a common practice among Coptic children, and it takes many forms that Copts like, such as the cross, the Virgin's image, Saint George, and the tattoo artist. A tattoo artist works with a small, palm-sized machine that runs on electricity and makes a buzzing sound. The inscription can be found on the inside of the wrist or on the bottom of the hand. The shoulder is on the outer side of the arm, and sometimes the date of the visit is written at the bottom of the drawing.<sup>51</sup>



**Fig.10 Luxor.Arment city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge Tattoo drawing for a visitor (source:<https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 8:10 PM)**



**Fig.11 Luxor.Arment city (Elrezekat).Monastery of St.Gorge Tattoo drawing for a Baby (source: <https://www.facebook.com/Saint.George.M/> acces 9 Oct 2024 at 8:10 PM)**

<sup>51</sup> أشرف أيوب معوض ,حول الثقافة الشعبية القبطية , الهيئة العامة لقصور الثقافة , 2010 , ص 45

## 12- THE ICON PROCESSION

One of the most important religious rituals in religious festivals is the celebration of the saint's ritual icon, also known as the icon cycle or procession. The high priest or bishop leads this procession, holding the cross in his hand, blessing the standing people and carrying the saint's icon on a four-wheeled stand, which is large in size. Behind hundreds of deacons who play tribal tunes and pass the icon in front of the people, they all began at the monastery church and returned to it. The procession is organized, and the people glorify and honor the saints of the icon in front of those who receive the saints' blessing.  
52



**Fig.12** the procession of st.the virgin Mary (Luxor )(photographed by researcher 21August 2024 at 4:30 Pm )

This ritual could be traced back to an ancient Egyptian tradition celebrating the Oracular Gods

## 13 -ORACULAR GODS.

The word “oracle” is derived from the Latin word *orāre* which means “to utter” or “to speak”<sup>53</sup>, The most common encountered term for “Oracle” is taken from “consultation, “wonder” and “Assertion.”<sup>54</sup> .

On festival days and religious ceremonies, temple priests carried the gods' statues in portable shrines outside for public viewing, as well as through

<sup>52</sup> أشرف أيوب معوض , حول الثقافة الشعبية القبطية, ص 47

<sup>53</sup>Mark Burgin , "Inaccessible Information and the Mathematical theory of Oracles", in Information Studies and the Quest for Trans disciplinarity. Unity through Diversity. World Scientific New York ,2017.pp.59-114.

<sup>54</sup>Teresa Moore, (2012),. "Oracles, Pharaonic Egypt "in The Encyclopedia of Ancient History. Blackwell Publishing Ltd ,2012. pp.1-4

city streets or to local shrines and necropolis regions. The gods were asked questions about the past or future and given ritualistic responses. .<sup>55</sup>

In Ancient Egypt, several oracular gods were known; the most famous was the god Amun, the name of which means the invisible, Imn. Oracular power was connected with the god in some places; the most known was Thebes. Documents show that Thebes was an oracular center for Amun, especially during the New Kingdom.<sup>56</sup>

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

A study of Coptic practices inherited from ancient Egypt reveals continuity and interaction between ancient Egyptian and Christian culture, particularly in areas such as offering sacrifices, tattooing, and icon procession. These practices reflect a strong cultural and religious influence, with elements of ancient Egyptian religion incorporated into the Coptic tradition. An overview of these practices is provided below:

### **1-Votive Offerings**

Offerings were an important part of ancient Egyptian religious rituals, with Egyptians offering sacrifices to the gods to ensure their protection and satisfaction. Food, beverages, and animals were among the offerings.

Votive offerings have been practiced in Christianity for as long as there have been shrines. It could be a subconscious continuation of the region's pagan religions, in which people make sacrifices to the gods to appease them. Thus, saints can be referred to as the "new gods." This practice is a symbolic continuation of the offering of sacrifices, but it has a Christian dimension.

### **2-Tattoos:**

Tattoos were used in ancient Egypt for both religious and medicinal purposes. Some inscriptions and statues show women with tattoos, particularly on the thighs, which are thought to have been associated with fertility and protection.

Tattooing remained popular in Christianity, particularly among Copts, as a symbol of religious identity. Coptic tattoos frequently include Christian symbols like the cross, images of the Virgin Mary, and saints. This practice reflects the continuation of the tattoo tradition, but its connotations have shifted to be associated with Christian identity.

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<sup>55</sup> Ana Rutz, , *The Spirit of Ancient Egypt*. Algora Publishing ,New Yourk,2001

<sup>56</sup> <https://jaauth.journals.ekb.eg/> access 12Oct 2024 at 2:58 PM

### **3- icon procession:**

In ancient Egypt, religious rituals included carrying sacred statues of the gods during festive processions. These processions were held during major religious events and as part of public celebrations.

In Coptic Christianity, this practice evolved into the "Icon Procession," in which icons of saints or the Virgin Mary are carried in festive processions on religious festivals. These processions continue the tradition of religious processions, but they take on a Christian character

According to studies, ancient Egyptian legacies in Coptic practices reflect a cultural and religious continuity between ancient Egypt and Christianity. These practices were modified and reinterpreted in the Christian context, demonstrating Egypt's ability to preserve its heritage while adapting to new religions.

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