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Martyrs, monks, and musicians: Two enigmatic Coptic vases in the Benaki Museum and their parallels

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Martyrs, Monks, and Musicians: Two Enigmatic Coptic Vases in the Benaki Museum and their Parallels

TWO HIGHLY UNUSUAL VASES stand out among the Coptic ceramics in the Benaki Museum (nos 1, 2). Similar in shape and elaborate representational decoration, they feature a large cylindrical body with a flaring collar added onto the shoulder and surrounding a wide mouth; female busts, full-length musicians, and basket weave decoration cover the entire surface of the body (and the collar on one example). Neither has a known find spot, though both were purchased in Egypt and the overall pictorial style recalls a number of representations from Coptic wall paintings and manuscripts. The hypothesis for an Egyptian origin is further enhanced by the fabric of both vases, probably Nile silt mixed with marl.

A small number of vases, now in the Louvre (nos 3, 4) and the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology (University College London) (nos 5, 6, 7), are almost identical to one of the Benaki vases (no. 1) in terms of shape, fabric, decorative technique, and style, and offer variations of the same iconographic motifs. Another almost complete piece, now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, and two shards from Bawit complete this small, enigmatic group.

CATALOGUE

1. Benaki Museum (inv. no. 13727) (figs 1a, 2a, 3, 4)
Acquired in Cairo (Tanos, 16/05/1936).
Max. pres. H. 25, collar rim diam. 25.3,
max. body diam. 19.9.
Bibliography: Unpublished.

Approximately one third preserved (foot and interior rim missing from profile). Coarse fabric with granular fracture, reddish-brown (Munsell 10R4/4), fired black at core. Rare, medium-sized limestone inclusions, rare gold mica plates, frequent elongated voids visible on interior surface. Thick, matt, flaky, off-white slip (lime?) on the outer surface. Bichrome (black/brown and red) decoration.

The vase features a cylindrical body with slightly convex walls and a carinated base and shoulder, to which an everted collar with a short horizontal rim is attached. A slight ridge marks the join on the outer surface. Directly above the join, the shoulder is pierced by four symmetrically placed holes. The interior rim and foot are missing. The body is wheel-made, the collar was made separately, and the holes were pierced with a spike. The decoration uses black/brown slip paint, highlighted with red (red dots on the hatched bands and columns, red shading on the cheek and forehead of the female bust). Traces of the original design can be detected on the slip where paint is missing.

Bands of triple crosshatched basket weave between two pairs of horizontal lines decorate the collar and lower body. Between the bands, a figurative frieze consists of two panels: one tall, narrow panel containing a female bust and one long panel containing three full-length male and female figures separated by two columns. The panel containing the female bust interrupts the lower band of cross-hatching. Two similar panels with figurative decoration probably completed the original decorative frieze: one tall panel probably containing a similar bust (as on nos 2 and 5) and one long panel with three figures (as on no. 2).

The female bust wears a veil and four rows of necklaces,

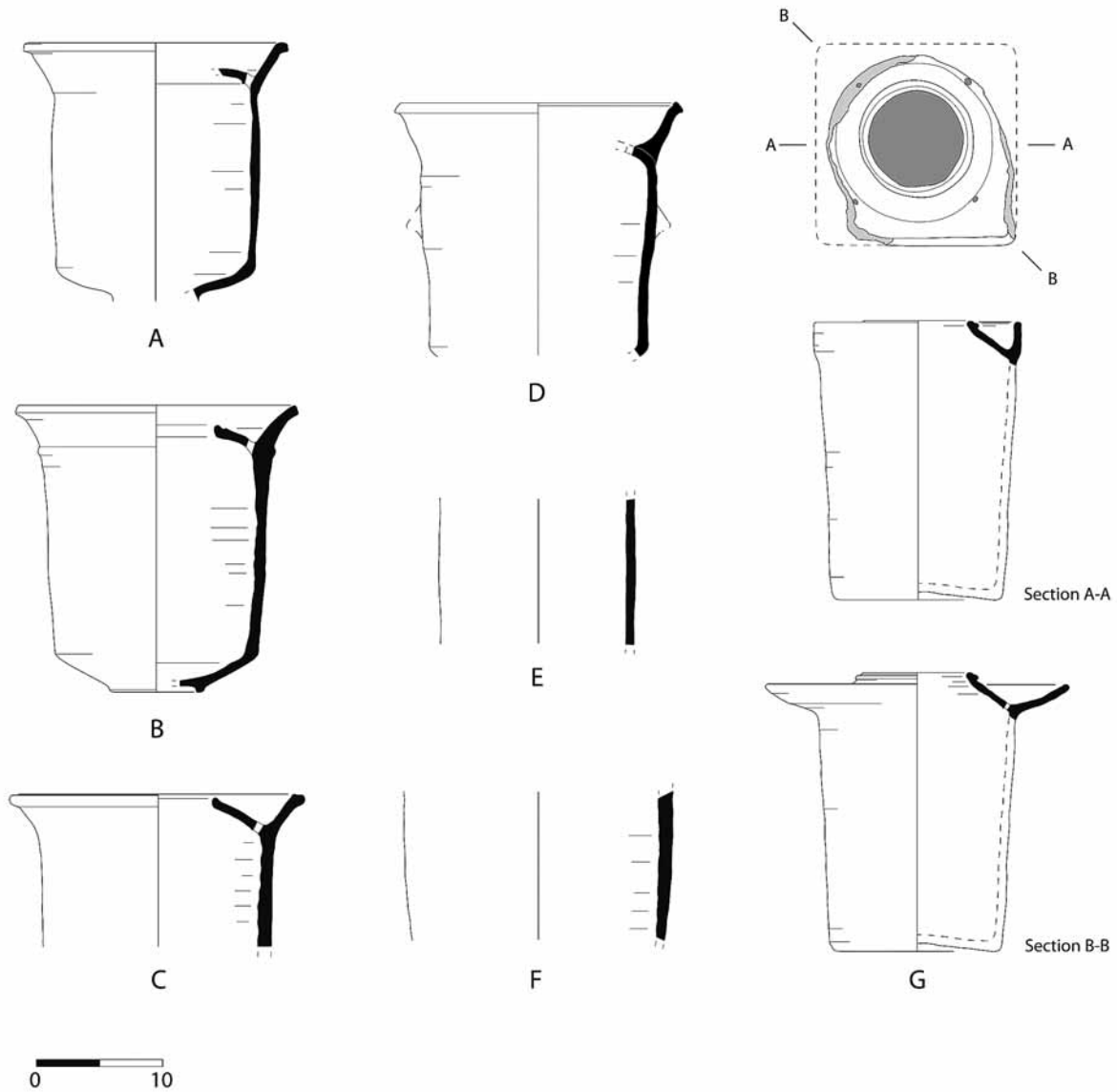


Fig. 1. Vases nos 1-7.

two with drop-shaped pendants. Traces of a long, narrow eyebrow, almond-shaped eye, and mouth are preserved, the latter rendered by a plain, horizontal line. Her cheek is highlighted with red. The woman's garment and the background are speckled. The three full-length figures have halos, identical bobbed hairstyles, and speckled long robes. The two side figures wear large hoop earrings, which identify them as women; since nothing else distinguishes them from the middle figure, this too may be a female. The figure on the left sits on a rounded stool with 'bejewel-

led' legs and holds a large rectangular object in front of her chest, probably a frame drum with concave sides, which she beats with her outstretched fingers. The middle figure holds a concave double-skin barrel drum, which hangs from his/her shoulder by a chain or rope. The seated (?) figure on the right wears a necklace with a semi-circular pendant and holds a possible string instrument with a large, elongated sound box, probably a lute. To its right are traces of an unidentified object or figure. The columns have identical capitals and bases decorated with large palmette leaves.

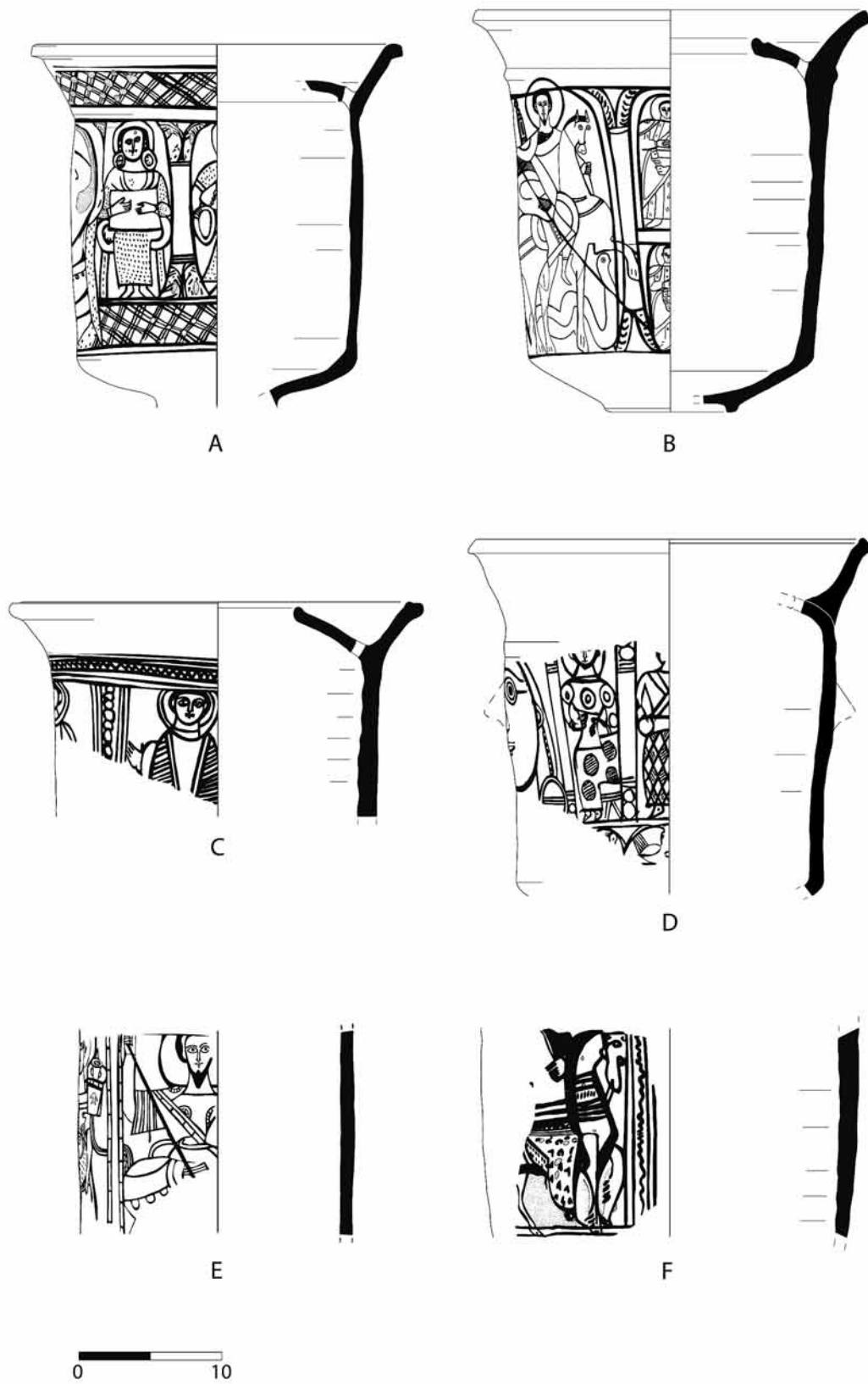


Fig. 2. Vases nos 1, 3-7.



Fig. 3. Vase cat. no.1. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 13727.



Fig. 4. Vase cat. no. 1. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 13727.

2. Benaki Museum (inv. no. 13729) (figs 1g, 5-6)
Acquired in Cairo (Tanos, 12/12/1936).
H. 26.7, collar 28×28, rim diam. 10, base diam. 15.5.
Bibliography: Unpublished.

Almost entirely preserved (collar rim damaged). Surface very worn, slip and paint poorly preserved. Coarse reddish-brown (Munsell 10R4/4) fabric. Thin, fugitive, cream slip. Monochrome decoration executed with thin, fugitive, brown slip paint.

The vase features a slightly tapering cylindrical body, concave base, and overhanging rim marked by a shallow groove on top. A large, rectangular, flaring collar with plain rim is attached to the carinated shoulder, which is pierced directly above the collar join by four holes placed on the axis of the collar's angles. The vase is wheel-made, the collar was made separately and attached onto the body, the holes were pierced with a spike.

Bands of double crosshatched basket weave between

lines decorate the shoulder, collar (both inner and outer surfaces), and upper and lower body. The main decorative frieze consists of two narrow panels alternating with two long ones. Each narrow panel depicts a female bust between speckled draperies. The busts have bobbed hair and wear several necklaces, two of which with rows of drop-shaped pendants. Each long panel depicts three alternately standing and sitting figures separated by slender columns with simplified palm capitals and bases. All six figures feature halos, dark bobs, large hoop earrings, and long speckled tunics. Two figures hold barrel drums with concave sides, and at least three more figures hold large rectangular objects, possibly frame drums (as on no. 1). Their fingers are spread open and their feet, alternately outlined and solid, point to the sides. At least two figures sit on stools with simple straight legs.

3. Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités



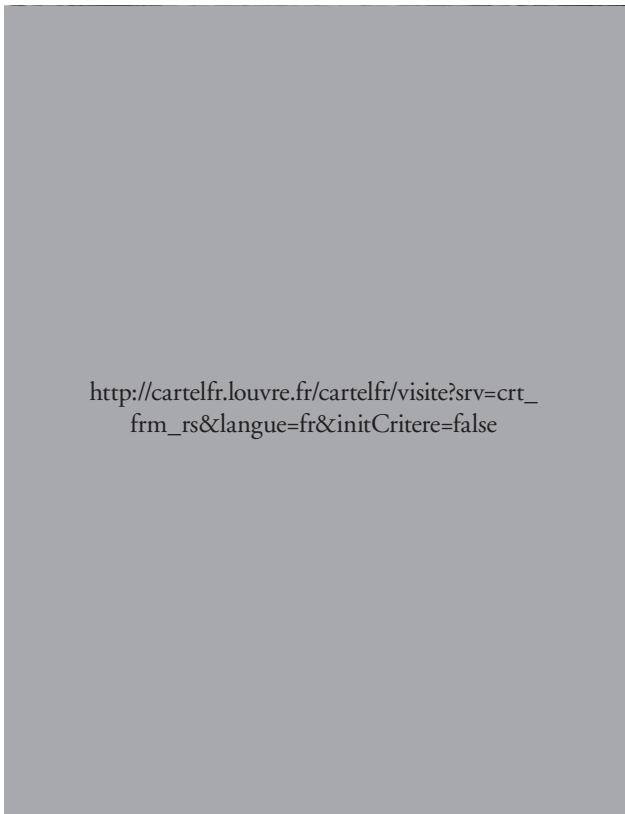
Fig. 5. Vase cat. no. 2, side A. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 13729.



Fig. 6. Vase cat. no. 2, sides B-D and top view. Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 13729.

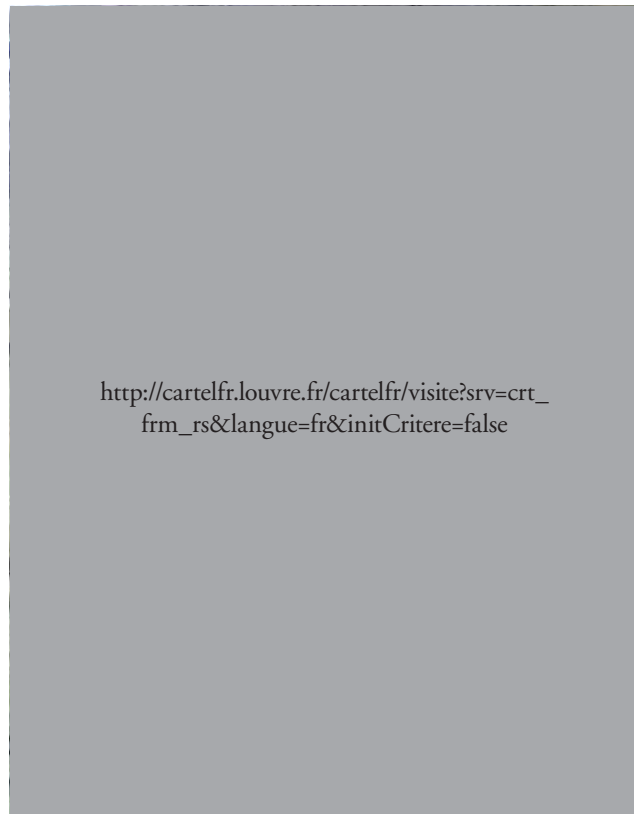
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Fig. 7. Vase cat. no. 3. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités égyptiennes, inv. no. E14361/AF6940
(photo: © H. Lewandowski, Musée du Louvre).



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Fig. 8. Vase cat. no. 3 (detail). Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités égyptiennes, inv. no. E14361/AF6940.



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Fig. 9. Vase cat. no. 3 (detail). Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités égyptiennes, inv. no. E14361/AF6940.

égyptiennes, inv. no. E14361/AF6940 (figs 7-10)

Acquired in Cairo (Nahman, 1933-1934).

H. 27.7, rim diam. 10.8, collar rim diam. 26.3, foot diam. 8.5.

Bibliography: Piankoff 1935; Neyret 1979; Metzger *et al.* 1989, 27, no. 19; Lucchesi-Palli 1982, 164, 169, fig. 5; Lyon-Caen 2000, 52, 53; *Guide du visiteur du Louvre, Antiquités Égyptiennes 2* (Paris 2001) 76; Rutschowskaya 2004, 74, 79, fig. 46; Lyon-Caen 2006.

Almost entirely preserved. Coarse fabric with granular fracture, reddish-brown (Munsell 10R4/4). Rare medium-sized white inclusions, some gold mica specks. Thick, matt, flaky, off-white slip (lime?) on the outer surface. Polychrome (black/brown, purplish brown, red) decoration.

Cylindrical, slightly tapering body with carinated base and shoulder, to which an everted collar is added, a ridge marking the join on the outer surface. Rounded interior

rim with shallow groove on top; collar rim tooled. Ring foot. Light ribbing on the inside. On the shoulder, directly above the join, four symmetrically placed holes. Sloppy manufacture resulting in irregular shape. The decoration uses black/brown slip paint for the design and black/brown and red wash as a fill in places.

A band of triple crosshatched basket weave between two pairs of horizontal lines decorates the collar's exterior surface. Interspersed on the basket weave are purplish-brown dots and twelve circular medallions, which originally contained human busts and geometric motifs (a bust and an X are visible under grazing light inside two medallions). Below are two narrow panels, each depicting a haloed male figure on horseback, alternating with two longer panels, each containing six male haloed figures standing under arcades in two superimposed rows, the upper row taller than the lower. Columns with palmette-shaped capitals and bases separate the panels and support the arcades.

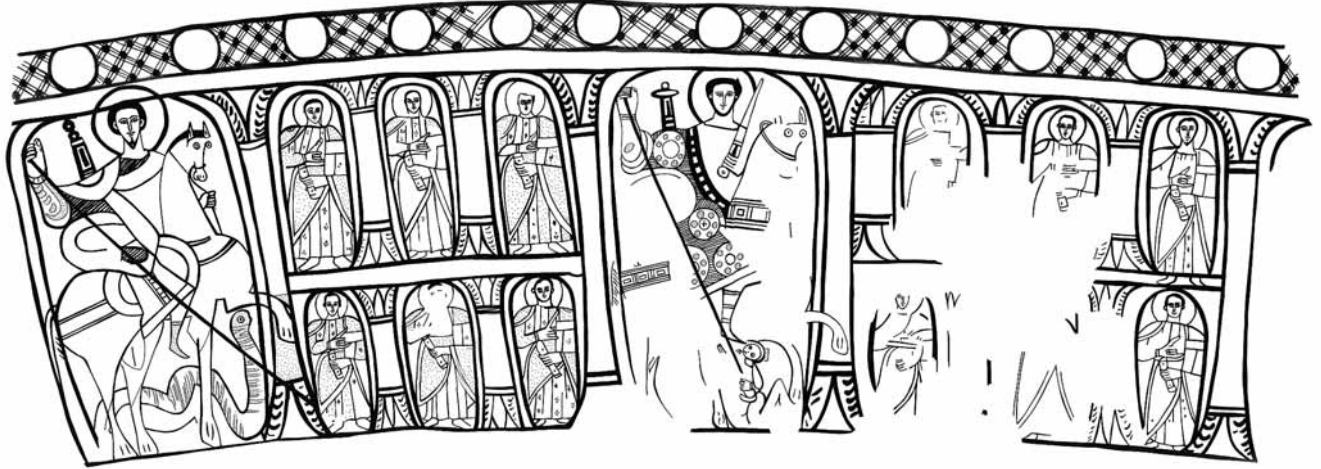


Fig. 10. Vase cat. no. 3. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités égyptiennes, inv. no. E14361/AF6940.

The horsemen's torso is depicted frontally, their lower body in profile astride their horse. One has dark bobbed hair, a narrow face, and a pointed beard. He wears a draped, billowing mantle and a lamellar cuirass, suggested by oblique hatching, over a red, knee-length, long-sleeved tunic with single clavus, and red boots. His sword's bejewelled pommel shows behind his right shoulder. His raised right hand holds a spear, which he aims at a large serpent with red ribbing undulating beneath the rearing horse. His horse is shown in profile, its head turned slightly towards the viewer. The horse trappings include a nose strap, collar, reins, breeching, and a saddle blanket, all undecorated. The second rider has a fuller face and rounded beard. He wears a similarly hatched tunic, a mantle with decorated hem, and boots. Four large circular phalerae decorated with red dots complete his costume. He carries two swords, one in its scabbard hanging from his back, the other in his left hand. His right hand holds a lance, which he uses to impale a small prostrate human figure, whose head and hands are barely visible under the horse's hooves. Like the first horse it has bulging eyes, pointed ears, and a long, smooth tail. Its collar and breeching feature large rectangular jewel-like ornaments.

The twelve haloed figures have short, dark hair. Their long tunics are decorated with clavi embroidered with dots and crosses, and their red hemmed coats drape elaborately over their hips, shoulders and left arm. They raise their

right index awkwardly in a gesture of speech and hold a scroll in their left hand against their abdomen. Their feet point outwards.

The composition was quickly executed, resulting in panels of unequal size. The rendering of the figures is linear and highly stylized, similar in style to that on no. 1. Long arched eyebrows frame the small, almond-shaped eyes, which join the long, straight nose. Straight horizontal lines render the mouth and chin, and small semi-circles indicate the ears.

4. Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités égyptiennes, inv. no. E14331 (figs 11-13)

Donated by Pozzi, French ambassador in Tehran (1934).

Max. pres. H. 14.6, rim diam. 5.5, collar rim diam. 28.

Bibliography: Unpublished.

Approximately one third preserved (upper part). Interior surface up to the base of the shoulder covered in a black film, possibly oil or resin residue. Very coarse fabric with hackly fracture, reddish-brown (Munsell 10R4/4-4/6), fired black at core. Frequent small to large white inclusions, rare gold mica specks, frequent elongated voids. Thick, matt, flaky, off-white slip (lime?) on the outer surface. Polychrome (black/brown, red, yellowish green) painted decoration.

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Fig. 11a-b. Vase cat. no. 4. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités égyptiennes, inv. no E14331
(photo: © G. Poncet).

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Fig. 12. Vase cat. no. 4. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités égyptiennes, inv. no. E14331 (photo: © G. Poncet).

Cylindrical, slightly tapering body with wide ribbing on the inside. Carinated shoulder, to which an everted collar is added (join visible). Rounded interior rim, rounded collar rim with shallow groove on top. On the shoulder, directly above the join, four symmetrically placed holes. Sloppy manufacture resulting in irregular shape and diameter (collar). Decoration painted with thin, black/brown slip-paint over a preliminary sketch of white slip, visible under the paint or where the paint was lost. Yellowish green wash applied under the collar's basket weave pattern and in two panels (panel e: preliminary sketch executed over the wash; panel f: wash used as a fill for the camel's body).

A large band of double crosshatched basket weave decorates the collar. A horizontal band consisting of a zigzag between triple lines marks the collar's base. Below this, six vertical panels separated by vertical bands of circles between triple vertical lines contain:

a/ Part of a haloed male figure with short hair and a sleeveless coat decorated with cross-hatching. The head is slightly turned to the right. The facial features are not preserved.

b/ The head, torso, arms, and hands of a standing male with halo and short hair, wearing a hatched sleeveless coat over a tunic.

c/ The head and torso of a haloed or veiled, probably

female figure with bobbed hair and large hoop earrings, holding a possible string instrument. Traces of an unidentified motif are preserved to the figure's left.

d/ Part of the head and shoulder of a haloed figure with short hair. A large almond-shaped motif with cross-hatching at the centre is visible to the figure's right.

e/ A vegetal motif, such as a palm branch, with five long, spiky leaves.

f/ The hump, neck, and head of an animal, probably a camel, chewing on a flower. The head features two rectangular growths on the head (horns?) and two small ears.

The rendering is similar to that of no. 1, though less detailed.

5. University College London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, inv. no. UC19481 (figs 14-16, 20)

Acquired by W. M. Flinders Petrie, probably between 1880 and 1898.¹

Max. pres. H. 24.5, collar rim diam. 26, max. pres. body diam. 22.5.

Bibliography: Milne 1898, 113; Milne³ 1924, 250, fig. 148; Murray 1935, 2, pl. I, 1-4, 6, IX.3-5, X.6; Teasley Trope *et al.* 2005, 172, no. 134.

Seven fragments adding to approximately two thirds of the vase; parts of the wall, inner rim and base missing. Interior of the vase and of the single preserved hole covered with traces of a thick, shiny, dark substance in the form of solidified droplets; fine, dark film of the same (?) substance on interior surface of collar. Coarse fabric with granular fracture, brownish-red (Munsell 10R4/6), fired grey at core. Frequent small to medium-sized inclusions (white, grey), some gold mica specks, frequent voids. Thick (0.05-0.1 cm), matt, flaky, off-white slip (lime?) on the exterior surface. Plastic and painted (black/brown) decoration.

Cylindrical body with wide ribbing on the interior. Everted collar added onto the carinated shoulder (join visible in the break). Rounded interior rim, rounded collar rim with shallow groove on top.

A band of triple crosshatched basket weave decorates the collar. Below this, the main decorative frieze is framed by double horizontal lines and divided into four panels. Two tall panels on opposite sides of the vase contain a large female bust each. The better-preserved bust features a plastic nose (tip missing) that is painted brown. The bust on the



Fig. 13. Vase cat. no. 4. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités égyptiennes, inv. no. E14331.

opposite side probably also had a plastic nose, the two noses probably serving as lugs. Concentric circles denote the eyes and irises, double semi-circles the ears. Horizontal lines render the kohl lines, wavy eyebrows, and small mouth. Short vertical lines indicate the hairline. Both busts wear veils and large pendant earrings, ball-shaped and triangular. A checker pattern denotes the garment on the neck of one bust.

Between the busts, are two long panels. One panel contains three haloed figures holding musical instruments, separated from the busts and from each other by columns with identical capitals and bases consisting of two or three superimposed circles separated from the shaft by a triple line. The standing central figure and the head and torso of the seated side figures are represented frontally; the lower body of the side figures faces left, revealing a small stool with oblique legs. All three figures have short dark hair and elaborately decorated garments. The left figure features concentric circles on the bodice and hatched circles on the skirt; he holds a small rectangular frame drum with concave sides or claps his hands. The middle figure wears a checkered skirt and plays a barrel drum with concave sides. The right figure dons a long tunic with dense herringbone pattern and striped (or pleated) skirt; he plays a trumpet with long slender neck and triangular bell. The faces feature long arched eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes that join the long, straight nose, a mouth and chin indicated by straight lines, and small, semi-circular ears. Dots denote their ankles.

On the opposite side, the long panel depicts a similarly seated figure and a haloed rider with his horse, all partially preserved. The seated figure's legs face right; plain and crosshatched circles decorate its tunic, which partially covers a striped (or pleated) skirt. The rider features short,

dark hair, a narrow face, and a pointed beard. He wears an overcoat with dense herringbone pattern over a long-sleeved tunic and brandishes a sword in his raised right hand while pointing upward with the index of his raised left hand, which also holds the reins. The horse has short, curvaceous legs and rounded hooves. Traces of its saddle blanket and breeching are visible. Below each long panel is a band of fish and birds (possibly ducks) framed by lotus flowers with splaying petals.

The style is linear and vigorous, much like on no. 1.

6. University College London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, inv. no. UC19480 (figs 17-18)

Acquired by W. M. Flinders Petrie, possibly between 1880 and 1898.

Max. pres. H. 14, max. pres. body diam. 18.8.

Bibliography: Milne ³1924, 250, fig. 148; Murray 1935, 1-2, pl. I.5, IX.1.

Large body shard. Coarse fabric with granular fracture, brownish red (Munsell 10R4/4), fired grey at core. Frequent, small to medium sized inclusions (white, grey), frequent gold mica specks, voids. Thick, matt, flaky, off-white slip (lime?) over light brown undercoat on outer surface. Painted bichrome (black and red) decoration; black/brown wash used as fill in places.

Vase probably similar to nos 1, 3-5, but smaller. Vertical bands resembling reed poles frame two partially preserved panels of different widths. The left (narrow) panel depicts a male haloed figure with dark bobbed hair and round chin. He wears a dark tunic with long, wide sleeves and simple decoration at the hem, which resembles a monk's cassock. He clutches an amphora with his left arm and one or two



Fig. 14. Vase cat. no. 5. London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, inv. no. UC19481 (after: Teasley Trope *et al.* 2005, 172).

fish with his right hand. The amphora features a long tapering body, pointed bottom, sharply carinated shoulder, short, flaring neck, and small handles curving from the neck to the shoulder and curiously meeting behind the neck. A narrow decorative (?) band marks the amphora's shoulder. A possible *dipinto*, in the form of two arrowheads, is marked in red below the shoulder. Red paint inside the amphora mouth probably indicates its contents (wine?).

The right (large) panel depicts a haloed rider in military costume. His upper body is shown frontally. Only the horse's rear with its tail, breeches, and saddle is preserved. The rider features a long face with pointed beard and dark bobbed hair. He wears a wide-sleeved tunic and a chlamys with decorated hem. Three circular panels or phalerae complete his costume. He holds a spear in his raised right hand. Both figures feature large almond-shaped eyes that join the long, straight nose. Horizontal lines indicate the eyebrows, mouth, and chin.

7. University College London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, inv. no. UC19482 (fig. 19)

Acquired by W. M. Flinders Petrie, possibly between 1880 and 1898.

Max. pres. H. 14.5, max. pres. body diam. 25.5.

Bibliography: Murray 1935, 2, pl. I.9, IX.2.

Large body shard. Coarse fabric with granular fracture, brownish red (Munsell 10R4/4) fired grey at core. Frequent small to medium sized inclusions (white, grey), frequent gold mica specks, voids. Thick, matt, flaky, off-white slip (lime?) over a light brown undercoat on the outer surface. Painted bichrome (black/brown and red) decoration.

Vase probably similar to nos 1, 3-5, with thicker walls. The partially preserved panel is framed by vertical (four straight, one undulating in the middle) and horizontal (two straight) lines. It depicts a horse and its rider. Shown in profile, the trotting horse features an elaborately decorated collar and a spotted saddle blanket. The rider wears long, baggy pantaloons decorated with dark arrowhead



Fig. 15a-b. Vase cat. no. 5 (details). London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, inv. no. UC19481.

motifs and red dots, over a tunic with decorative hem. Part of his torso and left (?) hand are also preserved. The design is more fluid, the lines thicker, and the overall style sketchier than on nos 1-6.

An eighth, almost complete example, now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, belongs to the same group of vases.² A horizontal band of triple crosshatched basket weave decorates the collar (as on nos 1-5). Six similar vertical bands divide the body into six panels, each band featuring three medallions containing a star or solar motif in reserve against a red background (as on no. 3), each panel depicting a standing haloed male figure in a long, elaborately draped tunic. The six figures fold their arms over their abdomen, the index and middle finger of the right hand lifted in a gesture of benediction. Like nos 1-7, the Cairo vase has no known provenance.

Two pottery shards from the recently excavated Church D at Bawit probably belong to this type of vase.³ One is a collar rim fragment with the beginnings of the shoulder, the other a body fragment with the beginnings of the shoulder. Both have painted decoration: the former depicts birds alternating with floral or geometric motifs, the latter a human head and adjacent column directly below a dotted band marking the beginnings of the shoulder, exactly as on our nos 1-7. The only two examples of this type of vase with a known findspot, they come from mixed deposits with material dating from the seventh to the tenth/eleventh centuries.

FORM

This exceptional group of vases combines a highly unusual shape with a recurring repertoire of specific human figures and secondary motifs. The tall, cylindrical body is paired with a splaying collar and four peripheral holes, which may have served the purpose of collecting and redirecting inside the body any liquid spilt when filling the vase or removing its contents. Evidence for such a liquid can be sought in the dark organic residue (oil, or resin, or both) lining the interior surface of nos 4 and 5 (fig. 20). Alternatively, the holes might have also held suspension chains (though their location at the base of the shoulder renders this hypothesis unlikely), string in order to secure a lid, or wicks. We can assume that, like no. 2, nos 1 and 3-7 had a solid (not pierced)

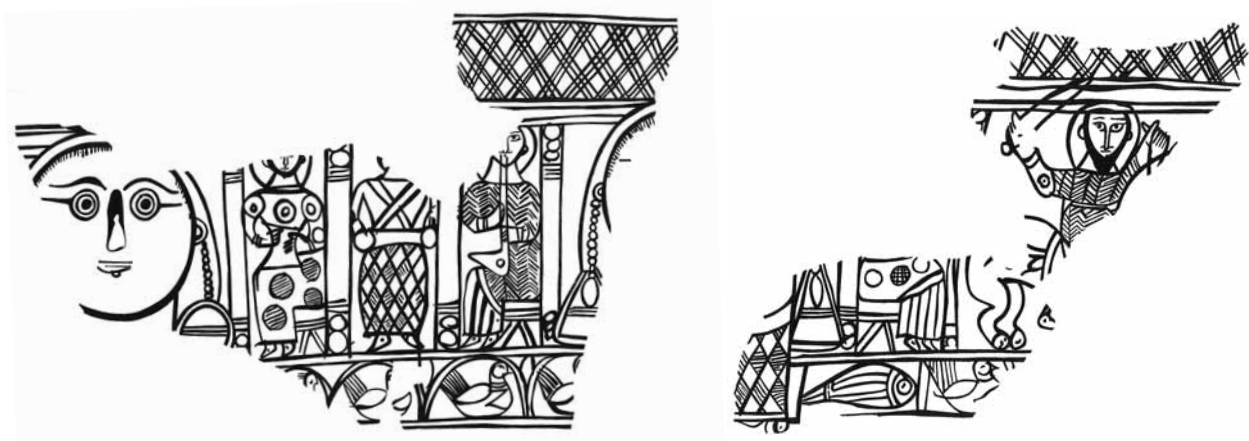


Fig. 16. Vase cat. no. 5. London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, inv. no. UC19481.

bottom. The ring-shaped or flat base would have allowed the vases to stand on a level surface.

A morphological parallel can be found in a vase from Kellia (Kôm 366), the concept and dimensions of which closely resemble the concept and dimensions of nos 1-6.⁴ The Kellia vase features a tall, bell-shaped body with a flat base, wide mouth, splaying collar, and four peripheral holes at the collar's base. It also comes with four ring-shaped holders integral to the collar. The presence of a greasy film, interpreted as oil residue, in the vase's interior, led Georges Egloff to identify the object as a lighting device, a kind of lamp stand with integral oil container and holders, the latter possibly for conical glass inserts. The same context at Kôm 366 yielded two further fragmentary objects of this type, of which one originally featured six annular holders.⁵ Kôm 219 also produced a similar vase.⁶ All of the Kellia examples come from domestic rooms and from seventh-century contexts.

With their multiple holders arranged in a circle, the Kellia vases recall the multi-nozzled pottery and metal lamps and metal polykandela widely used in the Early Christian and Islamic periods.⁷ Their particularity lies in the large reservoir, which keeps fuel at hand, dispensing from the need to seek it from a separate container. The holes on the shoulder should redirect any fuel spilt during the filling process into the reservoir. Egloff even put forward the hypothesis of wicks fed perpetually from the reservoir, comparing them to the 'eternal' or 'ever-burning' lamps (ἀκοίμητοι κανδηλές or λυχνίαι) frequently mentioned in texts as burning in the most sacred parts of a church, but

also near tombs, relics, and holy images.⁸ Through its association with a holy place or object, the oil of lamps that were kept burning continuously was believed to have medicinal and prophylactic properties, as several accounts of miraculous healings suggest.⁹ 'Eternal' lamps that were tended regularly may not have had a use for a large reservoir unless their oil was particularly sought after, as was, for example, the oil from the 'eternal' lamps burning before the Holy Sepulchre and the tomb of Job, which, according to Egeria, was poured into eulogies, allowing pilgrims to take home its blessing and protection from spiritual and physical evils.¹⁰

DECORATION

The decoration of nos 1-7 is as intriguing as their form. It is based on a more or less standard repertoire of human figures, which are combined in different ways probably according to the requirements of different clients or destinations. As far as I know, comparable decorative schemes do not occur elsewhere on pottery. The subject matter, with its obvious religious connotations, recalls representational art on other media, such as wall painting, manuscript illumination, and textiles.

The decoration is organized in tall panels and long friezes framed by bands of secondary decorative motifs (geometric, vegetal, animal). The panels, which contain the larger figures (busts, horsemen, isolated saints), often resemble the rectangular *tabulae*, or *emblemata*, of textiles. Smaller

figures, separated by columns, populate the friezes. The use of arcades for separating and framing human figures (nos 1-3, 5, 6) has numerous examples in wall painting, sculpture, and textiles,¹¹ as does that of medallions (no. 3 and Cairo vase).¹² The vegetal capitals on nos 1-3 recall actual capitals from the monasteries of Saint Phoibamon at Deir el Bahari (sixth-seventh centuries) and Apa Jeremiah at Saqqara (sixth-eight centuries).¹³ Basket weave is a common decorative motif in sculpture, particularly on capitals, and on textiles; its use on nos 1-5, the shape of which recalls baskets, might be seen as a reference to the actual object.¹⁴

Female busts

The two Benaki Museum vases (nos 1, 2) and one of the Petrie Museum pieces (no. 5) depict musicians and female busts. The position of the busts on opposite sides of the vase and the plastic rendering of the noses on no. 5 recall the grotesque relief faces decorating the neck of several Coptic jars or jugs. One such example, now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, shows a bejewelled woman on one side and a bearded man on the other.¹⁵ Others depict male faces only.¹⁶

In terms of composition, the panels with female busts evoke the numerous Coptic textile *tabulae* that depict richly dressed and bejewelled, often wreathed or haloed ladies surrounded by geometric or vegetal decoration. Usually identified as deities (such as the earth goddess *Ge*) or allegories (Hours, Seasons), these busts served as benevolent household images associated with abundance and prosperity.¹⁷ A textile, now in the Brooklyn Museum, shows a haloed female bust wearing ball earrings and a multicoloured checkered garment, much like the one on no. 5, surrounded by Nilotic scenes (fig. 21).¹⁸ The female busts on no. 5 are associated with a frieze of ducks and fish, a possible reference to the waters surrounding the earth (*Ge*). Veiled and richly adorned, the busts on nos 1, 2 and 5 also recall the busts of anonymous female saints or personifications decorating the walls of Chapel XLII in the monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit.¹⁹

Alternatively, the necklaces featured on nos 1, 2, with their multiple strands and piriform pendants, might represent throat tattoos, such as those worn by Eritrean and northern Ethiopian (Amharic) Christian women.²⁰ The practice of tattooing (religious and decorative) has a long tradition in Egypt. Common motifs on Egyptian mummies include dotted lozenges, circles, and lines across the chest, arms, and legs.²¹ Coptic tattoos consist primarily of

Christian motifs, such as crosses and images of saints, a permanent reminder of God's grace, an apotropaic device against evil spirits, and a means of religious and ethnic identification in a predominantly Muslim society.²²

Musicians

The female busts are systematically associated with representations of male and/or female musicians seated or standing under arcades (nos 1, 2, 5). An integral part of celebration and feasting, musicians are represented on Coptic textiles associated with dancers and other scenes of merrymaking.²³ Several Late Roman Egyptian papyri report that groups of musicians, like those depicted here, were employed to perform even in humble village houses during festivals.²⁴ Their association on no. 5 with the rider and Nilotic motifs (with their obvious apotropaic and salvational symbolism, see *infra*) reinforces their interpretation as images of religious celebration.

The musical instruments illustrated on nos 1, 2, 5, and possibly 4, belong to both the Byzantine/Arab and African/Egyptian traditions. The percussion instruments include the concave double-skin barrel drum, similar to the Arab *doumbek*, and the straight (or concave) frame drum, similar to the African *bendir* or *tamalin*, which was prominent in Egypt since the New Kingdom.²⁵ The latter is played 'lap style' on nos 1, 2, the drum resting on the musician's knees, the skin facing away from him, the fingers of both hands playing. This position is necessary when the frame drum is too large for handheld playing. On no. 5, the figure on the far left is either holding a small concave frame drum or clapping hands as is customary in Coptic chant for marking the rhythmical measure of the song.²⁶

A possible chordophone with a large, pear-shaped body is depicted on nos 1 and 4, lying across the player's lap. Its size and shape recall the Byzantine lute and Arab oud, two instruments normally associated with Byzantine and Islamic court iconography.²⁷ The Byzantine and Arab lutes differ significantly from the waisted long-necked Egyptian and Coptic lutes known from representations and from discoveries of actual objects.²⁸ Similar chordophones are depicted on a Coptic terracotta of a female musician from the Goshen necropolis (date uncertain)²⁹ and on a fragmentary Coptic textile, now in the Benaki Museum, showing a male or female musician with bobbed hair plucking the strings of a large lute or oud with the fingers of his or her right hand (ninth or tenth centuries) (fig. 22).³⁰



Fig. 17. Vase cat. no. 6. London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, inv. no. UC19480.

Finally, the wind instrument played by the far right musician on no. 5, with its long neck and wide, though somewhat oddly shaped, bell resembles both the ancient Egyptian trumpet and the Ethiopian *mäläkät* trumpet.³¹ A combination of instruments similar to the ones pictured here, namely a concave barrel-drum, a lute, and a long flute or trumpet, are depicted on an eighth- or ninth-century Iranian silver ewer from Perm.³²

Equestrian saints

The costume and weapons of the equestrian figures on nos 3, 5, and 6 identify them as military saints. The riders on no. 3 carry swords and spears and are shown in the act of spearing their foe, a reptile and a human lying beneath the horse's hooves. One of them wears the characteristic phalerae of the military, as does the rider on no. 6, who holds a partially preserved lance. The rider on no. 4 brandishes a sword, but wears a simple tunic decorated with a herring-



Fig. 18. Vase cat. no. 6. London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, inv. no. UC19480.

bone pattern like one of the musicians on the same vase.

Military saints were extremely popular in Egypt as in the rest of the Eastern Empire. Their cult is documented in papyri, inscriptions, and hagiographical texts. Several, including the popular Menas, Phoibammon, and Victor, were natives of Egypt, while others were appropriated by Egyptian tradition: Saint Theodore Stratelates, the great saint of Euchaita in Asia Minor, was given an Egyptian origin, whereas the Passion of Saint George appears to be an Egyptian creation. Also important were the cults of Saint Merkourios, a native of Asia Minor, and Saints Sergios and Leontios, both from Syria-Palestine.³³

Coptic iconography favoured the depiction of martyrs and military saints as riders very early on, probably drawing from the tradition of the dragon-slaying horseman, a motif developed in the Lagide and Roman periods. The dragon-slaying Coptic horseman is believed to continue the image of the mounted Horus/Harpocrates overcoming evil, an image probably established in the first century BC as part of the myth of Horus's battle against the forces of Typhon in his seeking vengeance for Osiris' death.³⁴ The famous Roman relief depicting the falcon-headed Horus spearing a crocodile, now in the Louvre (probably from Faras), is an example of the early iconography on which the Coptic horseman, who perpetuates this god's salvational and protective aspects, was modelled.³⁵ The Coptic horseman is portrayed as early as the third century on amulets and other objects as spearing a demon who lies on the ground beneath

his horse or a demonic enemy of reptilian form, such as the scorpion or crocodile that Horus/Harpocrates traditionally fought.³⁶ Coptic textiles and metalwork depicting a horseman spearing a reptilian adversary are common well into the eighth-ninth centuries.³⁷ One late example, an eighth-century textile now in Berlin, enhances the rider's salvational symbolism by associating the image of a horseman spearing a serpent with pomegranates, a symbol of immortality, forming a cruciform design in an adjacent roundel.³⁸

The holy rider can also be associated to a prostrate female demon as on several Byzantine magical amulets dating from the sixth century onwards.³⁹ Inscriptions on these amulets invoke Solomon, the archetypal exorcist of evil, or Saint Sisinnios, or both, thus identifying the holy rider with either or both of these figures. Sisinnios, who was not a soldier, but a dignitary of the imperial house at Antioch,⁴⁰ appears to have been the first Christian saint who absorbed Solomon's image as a horseman vanquishing a demon.⁴¹ He is also among the first saints to appear as a rider in Coptic iconography. Dated to the sixth or seventh century, the well-known wall painting from Chapel XVII in the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit represents the haloed saint on horseback spearing the female demon Alabasdra.⁴² His image is surrounded by symbols relating to both the Horus myth and Jewish magic, thus transforming the holy victory of good over evil into an apotropaic image.⁴³

With the image of the equestrian hero vanquishing his evil foe begins the long iconographical tradition of Coptic equestrian martyr saints, a tradition that continued uninterrupted and unaffected both by iconoclasm and the Islamic hostility towards religious images.⁴⁴ Several equestrian saints, including Sissinios, the famous military martyrs Phoibammon and Victor, and the more obscure Sabine, Horion, Bonakh, and Askla adorn the walls of Chapels XVII, XXVI, LI, and LVI in the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit.⁴⁵ Of these only Sisinnios is depicted in the act of spearing his adversary. A mounted Saint Theodore is depicted in the Monastery of Apa Jeremiah at Saqqara (sixth-eighth centuries).⁴⁶ At least three military saints, of which one is shown in the act of slaying a serpent, and one martyr saint on horseback adorn the nave of a basilica at Tebtunis in the Fayoum,⁴⁷ whereas an image of Theodore Stratelates and two more unidentified serpent-slaying saints decorate an unidentified building also at Tebtunis (dated to 953).⁴⁸ Equestrian military saints are present at

the Monastery of Abou Maqar (haikal of Benjamin) in the Wadi Natroun (tenth-eleventh centuries: Claudius and Menas),⁴⁹ the monastery of Naqlun in the Fayoum (1022-1032: Merkourios),⁵⁰ the North Church of the Monastery of the Martyrs (Deir al-Shohada) in the Esna desert (1129/30 or 1179/80: Claudius, Theodore Stratelates, a possible George),⁵¹ the Monastery of Saint Anthony in the Eastern Desert (1232-3: George, Merkourios, Theodore Stratelates, Theodore the Anatolian, Claudius, Victor, Menas, Sisinnios, Phoibammon, and John of Heraclea),⁵² and, finally, the Monastery of Saint Paul (eighteenth century: Menas, Julius of Aqfahs, Apater, Irene, Isidore, Sakhiroun/Iskhirun of Qalin, and James the Sawn-Asunder).⁵³ Equestrian saints, such as Theodore Stratelates, Merkourios, Menas, and Ptolemy, often spearing their foe, are also depicted in several Coptic manuscripts as early as the eighth-ninth centuries.⁵⁴

Like the generic Coptic rider, equestrian saints came to symbolize victory over the forces of evil and, ultimately, triumph over death.⁵⁵ Their icons and relics were considered to possess apotropaic powers and to act as intercessors with the divine.⁵⁶ As guards and protectors they are conveniently placed near the entrance to a church, as at Tebtunis and Deir al-Shohada, or its sanctuary, as in the khurus at Saint Anthony's.⁵⁷

With the notable exception of the eulogies depicting Saint Menas on horseback,⁵⁸ images of horsemen are rare on Coptic pottery and can hardly be interpreted as specifically religious. Examples include a bowl fragment from Kellia (hermitage QR 195) with hints of a bearded rider and his horse's mane and bridles, and another from Antinoe (from the north cemetery, dated to the sixth century) depicting the head and hand (holding a spear?) of a human figure and the possible traces of a horse's mane.⁵⁹ The lack of inscriptions identifying the riders on nos 3, 5 and 6 might suggest that these, too, were generic apotropaic images of the kind deeply rooted in Egyptian tradition, rather than representations of specific saints. They do, however, use iconographic details that in other media, such as monumental painting, would serve to distinguish one saint from another.

Thus, the man-slaying rider with two swords on no. 3 follows the iconographic type of Saint Merkourios, the Copts' *Abou Sifein* (Father of the two swords), shown here in the act of vanquishing Julian the Apostate. Other man-slaying military saints, such as Saint George and Saint Claudius, can be excluded on this account.⁶⁰ Martyred under Decius,



Fig. 19a-b. Vase cat. no. 7. London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, inv. no. UC19482.

Merkourios was first associated with Julian's death by John Malalas (c. 570), who claims to derive his information from Eutychianos, an early fifth-century author.⁶¹ In Egypt, the legend of Saint Merkourios killing Julian appeared in the seventh century in John of Nikiou's Chronicle and in the History of the Church of Alexandria. This legend was supposedly translated into Coptic in the sixth century. Merkourios's association with Julian's death may explain his great success after the Arab conquest, when he was perceived as a defender of Christians.⁶² In fact, his cult was scarcely documented before the ninth century, after which no fewer than twenty-seven shrines are known and the name Merkourios became popular among Christians in Egypt.⁶³

A youthful, beardless Merkourios (inscribed *o hagios Merkourios*) impaling the small, bearded figure of Julian (*Ioulianos*) is depicted in a ninth-tenth century Coptic manuscript (Vatican Copto 66, fol. 287) (fig. 23). At the top right corner of the image, an angel holds a sword intended for the saint – his emblematic second sword – as stated in the accompanying inscription. The pommel of Merkourios's own sword is visible behind his back, as on the Louvre vase (no. 3).⁶⁴ A possibly ninth- or tenth-century Coptic icon, now at Saint Catherine's on Mount Sinai, repeats this iconographic scheme, though only Julian's head is preserved under the horse.⁶⁵ An elaborately armed Saint Merkourios is depicted at the Naqlun Monastery (1022–1032).⁶⁶ At the Monastery of Saint Anthony's (1232/3) Merkourios holds an honorary position as guardian of the khurus together with Saint George. He is armed with two swords, one in its scabbard, behind his saddle, the other held in his left hand (as on no. 3). An angel touches the blade of this sword indicating its miraculous origin. The saint also holds a spear in his right hand, which he uses to take Julian's life.⁶⁷

The military saint impaling a serpent on no. 3 has been tentatively identified as Saint Theodore on account of his narrow face and short, pointed beard, which correspond to the saint's prevalent portrait type.⁶⁸ The military saint on no. 6 has similar facial features. Though not the only saint associated with the miracle of dragon slaying, Theodore was extremely popular in Egypt to the point of being assimilated by the local hagiographic tradition. According to his Greek passion preserved by Gregory of Nyssa, Theodore was a conscript soldier (τῆρων) killed under Maximian at Amasia and buried at Euchaita.⁶⁹ His legend



A



B

Fig. 20. Vase cat. no. 5. London, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, inv. no. UC19481.

was already enriched with miracles in the fifth century, and later (possibly in the eighth century) with the killing of the dragon of Euchaita.⁷⁰ In the ninth century, the saint was doubled, hence the apparition of Theodore the General (στρατηλάτης) next to Theodore Tiron. In fact, the legend of Tiron gave birth to two separate legends of the Stratelates: a Coptic and a Greek legend, of which the Coptic is probably earlier by approximately a century. Late Coptic tradition (eighth century and later) considers Theodore a native of Egypt, who went to Euchaita as a soldier to fight the Persians and was martyred at Antioch under Diocletian.⁷¹ The same sources name him 'the General' and attribute to him the death of the Euchaita dragon, normally associated with Theodore Tiron in Greek tradition. According to the Coptic legend, Theodore was buried at Sotep/Hypsele, south of Lykopolis, where his relics were reportedly kept in the twelfth century. There exists, however, a second Coptic Passion, probably of the seventh century, which is close to the Greek Passion of Theodore Tiron and bears no reference to Egypt. A third Theodore,



Fig. 21. Textile of haloed head of a woman, sixth century.
Wool and linen, 24 x 24 cm. Brooklyn Museum,
Gift of Pratt Institute, inv. no. 42.438.4.



Fig. 22. Wall hanging of musician with a string instrument.
Wool, H. 74 cm. Athens, The Benaki Museum of Islamic Art,
inv. no. ΓΕ 8496.

the so-called 'Anatolian', a companion of Leontios the Arab and Panegyris the Persian, is mentioned in Coptic literature, his *Acta* translated from Greek.⁷²

Images of the equestrian Saint Theodore spearing the dragon are not uncommon in Coptic Egypt.⁷³ He appears twice at Saqqara, trampling on the dragon and on horseback accompanied by the inscription *Theodoros Pestratelates*.⁷⁴ A ninth- or tenth-century, possibly Coptic, triptych leaf now in the Monastery of Saint Catherine's in Mount Sinai shows Saint Theodore in a similar pose.⁷⁵ A wall painting from Tebtunis, dated by inscription to 953, depicts Saint Theodore spearing a giant snake that rises up to face the saint (as on no. 3), while a widow standing before the horse pleads for the saint to rescue her sons, who are intended as a sacrifice to the dragon and are pictured beneath the horse's legs.⁷⁶ The same iconographic scheme appears in a ninth- or tenth-century Coptic manuscript (Vatican Copto 66, fol. 210v):⁷⁷ named by inscription (*o Hagios Theodoros Pestratelates*) and sporting his characteristic pointed beard, Theodore spears the serpent, while a woman standing before him points at him and at her two children, who curl up between the horse's rear legs (fig. 24). In the North

Church of the Monastery of the Martyrs (Deir al-Shohada) at Esna (1129/30 or 1179/80), Saint Theodore Stratelates is depicted with two other equestrian saints, Claudius and a possible George.⁷⁸ Theodore's image is damaged, but one can make out a pointed beard and a spear. Finally, both Theodore Stratelates and Theodore the Anatolian are depicted at the Monastery of Saint Anthony (1232/3), the former spearing the serpent accompanied by the widow and her sons, the latter very partially preserved.⁷⁹

No trace of a halo or weapons allows the rider depicted on no. 7 to be identified as a soldier or a saint. Unlike the riders on nos 3 and 6, he wears a long robe over baggy pantaloons, the characteristic Arab *sirwal*. Although the *sirwal*'s legs hang free as in civilian dress (soldiers tucked theirs into their boots or covered them with leggings), this does not rule out the rider's military status, as the image of Saint Victor dressed in a *sirwal* and slippers at the Monastery of Saint Antony (1232/3) suggests.⁸⁰

Monk

The haloed figure carrying an amphora and fish on no. 6 wears a dark cassock, which identifies him as a monk. His

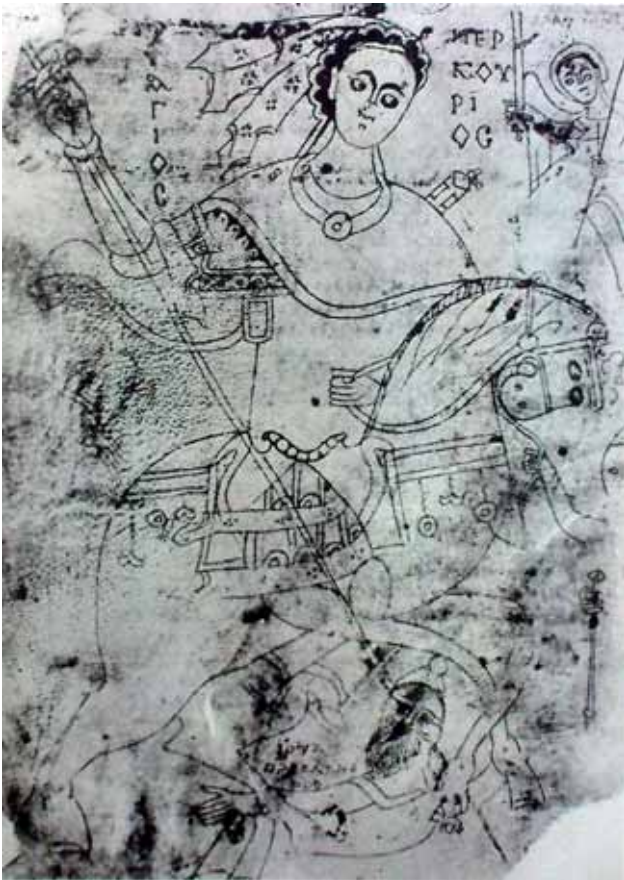


Fig. 23. Saint Merkourios. Vatican Copto 66, fol. 287
(after: Leroy 1974, pl. 105.2).



Fig. 24. Saint Theodore. Vatican Copto 66, fol. 210v
(after: Leroy 1974, pl. 105.1).

association with an equestrian saint (Theodore?) brings to mind a miniature from an eleventh-century Coptic (Sahidic) manuscript of the Martyrdom of Saint Ptolemy of Nikentori (modern Dendera) from Hamouli (fig. 25).⁸¹ The miniature depicts a youthful equestrian saint in military costume facing a bearded saint dressed in a long tunic and carrying a piriform flask or amphora with long neck tethered to a stick. Coptic inscriptions identify the saints as 'Apa Ptolemy the Magistrate' and 'Apa Paphnoutios the Ascetic'. The image illustrates the meeting of Ptolemy, a nobleman of Dendera, with the hermit Paphnoutios (Paphnoute).⁸² Ptolemy was out hunting when he encountered the hermit, who convinced him to renounce his wealth and become a disciple of Dorotheus at Antinoe. Eventually, Ptolemy confessed his faith publicly and was tortured by the governor at Toukh al-Kheil, a place west of Taha, where a church was later erected in his honour. Paphnoutios

may be one of several martyrs by the same name, including Paphnoute of Dendera, the famous hermit tortured by Arianus.⁸³ The monk Paphnoutios, who according to the Arabic synaxary travelled in the inner desert in search for hermits living in perfect solitude, may or may not be the same person.⁸⁴ Both martyrs were popular in Upper Egypt.

Could the monk carrying the amphora and fish on no. 6 be identified as Paphnoutios? The equestrian saint to his right (Theodore?) faces away from him, but we can imagine another equestrian saint (Ptolemy?) to the monk's left and turned towards him. This monk, of course, carries more than enough to eat and drink in the desert. The red colour inside the amphora's mouth suggests wine as its contents. With its sharply carinated shoulder and short, flaring neck, the amphora closely resembles the later variants of the Egyptian transport vessels grouped under the name Late Roman Amphora 7, which were produced from the



Fig. 25. Apa Ptolemy the Magistrate and Apa Paphnoutios the Ascetic. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library M 581 (after: Leroy 1974, pl. 37).



Fig. 26. Virgin and child with angels. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library M 612, fol. 1v [after: *L'art copte en Égypte. 2000 ans de christianisme* (exhibition catalogue, Institut du monde arabe, Paris 2000) 73, no. 50].

seventh to the mid-ninth centuries.⁸⁵ An intriguing red *dipinto*, shaped like a double arrow, decorates the amphora's body. The fish and wine might also be interpreted as offerings presented at a religious festival or even as symbols of abundance and prosperity.

Apostles

On no. 3 the equestrian saints are associated with twelve standing saints in identical pose and dress, most probably apostles. These closely resemble the youthful apostles of the Cairo vase (see *supra*), who are twice as large as the apostles on no. 3, wear elaborately draped pallia and tunics, and hold codices in their left hand.⁸⁶ They also recall the apostle Timothy (?) in an Arabic manuscript of 892, now at Saint Petersburg: dressed in a pallium and tunic decorated with dots forming cruciform motifs, he raises his right index and middle fingers in a gesture of benediction and holds a scroll in his left hand.⁸⁷ Comparable groups of apostles standing under arcades are depicted in the haikal of Benjamin at

Deir Abu Makar in the Wadi Natroun (ninth-tenth centuries) and on a fragmentary limestone epistyle from Saqqara carved with the images of seven apostles and Christ standing under arcades.⁸⁸

Fish and ducks

A frieze of ducks and fish separated by reeds completes the decoration of female busts, musicians, and horseman on no. 5. A standard decor on Coptic painted pottery, ducks and fish are also found on woodwork and textiles, often swimming among aquatic plants in lively compositions that symbolize the Nile's life-giving abundance and evoke Nilotic paradise.⁸⁹ As an attribute of ancient solar gods and the later Harpocrates, ducks were thought to suggest deification after death; they were also regarded as expressions of hope for future life through their erotic association with Aphrodite and her son Eros.⁹⁰ Here they echo and enhance both the motif of abundance introduced by the female personifications (busts) and that of death and triumph introduced by the horseman.

Orant figure

The most elusive iconography is offered by vase no. 4, with its four partially preserved haloed figures: one orant man and a possible female musician framed by two more men. A camel and a palm-shaped motif complete the composition. No. 4 may simply offer a juxtaposition of images of prayer and celebration coupled with standard Egyptian decorative motifs. Orant figures, often depicted in niches and, when more than two, under arcades, are a common theme in Coptic art. On funerary stelai they express the Christian prayer for the resting of the soul and for eternal life.⁹¹ On the other hand, it is tempting to see in the association of the orant figure and the camel a reference to Saint Menas, even though the two panels are not adjacent and the remaining three figures, particularly the female musician, cannot easily fit in with the Menas iconography. A native of Egypt, Saint Menas became immensely popular from the fifth century onwards, by which time his sanctuary in the Mareotis had gained fame as a healing centre. Several, often conflicting accounts of his life suggest that Menas was a soldier, whose cohort, according to one version of the story, was sent under Diocletian from Egypt to Cotyaeum in Phrygia. There he declared his faith openly and was beheaded. At his wish, his coffin was taken back to Egypt and was buried in the Mareotis after no camel could bear its weight. A wooden image carved before the burial and construction of a rudimentary shrine represented Menas as a soldier standing between two camels, an image perpetuated in Menas's subsequent iconography.⁹²

Menas's standard iconographical type, which shows the orant saint, youthful and beardless, in short military tunic and chlamys, standing between two camels appears on the numerous eulogies produced at his sanctuary and on several representations in wall painting and sculpture.⁹³ An ivory pyxis, now in the British Museum, introduces several more figures: four pilgrims to the saint's shrine and participants in scenes of the saint's judgement and martyrdom.⁹⁴ Another example of a fairly extensive pictorial cycle, this time of the saint's miracles set against the architectural frame of the saint's shrine, is provided by the eighth-century wall paintings of a chapel within the temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu.⁹⁵ If the orant figure on no. 4 is identified as Saint Menas, some or all of the other three figures may refer to episodes of his life and miracles. It is also tempting to see in them the saints whose names or images we find associated with Saint Menas on several eulogies: Thecla, whose

sanctuary was located at mid-distance between Alexandria and Abu Mena, Athenogenes, Konon, or Dios.⁹⁶

A different interpretation of the decorative scheme on no. 4 arises from Clémence Neyret's tentative identification of the almond-shaped motif with cross-hatched interior, which occupies the upper left corner of one panel, as the bandaged body of Lazarus rising from his grave.⁹⁷ An analogous image appears on a partially preserved ivory pyxis, now in the Louvre, where the decoration is divided into panels as on no. 4. The diminutive figure of the mummified Lazarus exiting from his grave occupies the upper left corner (the only preserved) of one panel, while a figure in draped garment faces the other way in the adjacent (also partially preserved) panel; Christ, Lazarus's sisters Martha and Maria, and possible onlookers probably completed the composition.⁹⁸ The raising of Lazarus, an expression *par excellence* of hope for future life, repeats the salvational symbolism introduced by the riders and Nilotic imagery on some of the other vases.

DATE

Vases nos 1 and 3-6 are almost identical in shape, fabric, decorative technique, and style. The rendering of the figures is linear and highly stylized, but confident and vigorous. It is tempting to attribute these vases, as well as the Cairo example, to the same workshop. No. 2 differs significantly in shape and fabric; it also shows a sketchier design and sloppy execution that are matched by the poor quality of the slip and paint. No. 7 has thicker walls than the other vases and is distinguished by a more fluid design, thicker lines, and different iconographic details.

The relative conservatism of Coptic iconography does not allow us to refine the broad chronological framework (seventh-tenth/eleventh centuries) provided by the two Bawit fragments (see above) and does not exclude an even later date. The Romano-Byzantine military costumes and horse trappings pictured on nos 3 and 6, for example, are common in Coptic art from the earlier representations of the Coptic rider until well into the late Middle Ages. Equestrian saints in knee-length tunics, leggings, boots, and military cloaks, armed with a spear and sword are illustrated in the ninth- or tenth-century Vatican Copto 66⁹⁹ and in the thirteenth-century wall paintings at the Monastery of Saint Anthony.¹⁰⁰ The 'bejewelled' collar and breaches of

Merkourios's horse (no. 3) recall those depicted on the Roman Horus relief¹⁰¹ and in a representation of the mounted Saint Menas from an eleventh-century Coptic manuscript, now in Manchester (John Rylands Library, Coptic S. 33).¹⁰² Pendant ornaments similar to those decorating the breeching on no. 5, though more elaborate, are pictured at Bawit (sixth-seventh centuries),¹⁰³ Tebtunis (eighth-ninth [?] centuries and 953),¹⁰⁴ and Saint Antony's (1232/3),¹⁰⁵ and are common on horse representations in sculpture and textiles.¹⁰⁶ However, considering that most of the later representations of military saints, such as those at Esna (1129/30 or 1179/80) and the majority at Saint Anthony's (1232/3), adopt the Turkish military dress and horse trappings (quilted coat, wool cap, composite bow, large saddle blanket) introduced in Egypt by the Ayyubids,¹⁰⁷ nos 3 and 6 are more likely to date before the Ayyubid period (c. 1171-1260).

The presence of Merkourios, on the other hand, suggests a probable date from the ninth century onwards for no. 3, since until then this saint is scarcely documented. A stylistic comparison, however risky, between the painted decoration on some of the vases and painting on other media also points to a date in the ninth-tenth centuries. The stylized, flat rendering of the faces on nos 1, 3-6, with the long, arched eyebrows that 'dip' to form the narrow nose, the almond-shaped eyes, the straight, seriffed line of the mouth, the dotted chin and dimples, closely resembles that of the Virgin and angels on a Hamouli miniature (Pierpont Morgan Library M 612, fol. 1v: 892/3) (fig. 26),¹⁰⁸ as well as the equestrian martyr from Tebtunis (953),¹⁰⁹ whose 'flaring' nostrils recall those of the saints on no. 6.¹¹⁰ The awkward hand gesture and exaggerated index finger of the apostles on no. 3 also appears in several Hamouli miniatures, most notably on Gabriel of the Annunciation (Pierpont Morgan Library M 597: 913/14).¹¹¹ An earlier date, however, is possible for no. 5. Here, the female busts with their round face, relief nose, and concentric circles for eyes recall the stylized features on a series of votive female statuettes attributed to the fourth-sixth centuries. Interestingly, these statuettes are made of brick-red Nile silt, whitewashed and painted, much like the vases examined here.¹¹²

COMMENT

The combination of all of the above motifs, both lay (female busts, musicians) and Christian (military saints, orant saint, monk, apostles), is unique on pottery and intriguing. Although some of the more generic motifs (busts, ducks, fish) are common to this medium, their association with the more specific representations of saints, such as the easily identifiable equestrian military saints Merkourios and Theodore, gives them a function beyond the merely decorative. Apart from the obvious religious connotations of the saintly figures, several symbolic themes emerge: protection (equestrian military saints, possible throat tattoos), salvation (equestrian military saints, Nilotic imagery), celebration (musicians), abundance and prosperity (female busts, Nilotic imagery, possible offerings of fish and wine). All but one vase (no. 4) bear at least one apotropaic motif (female busts, rider). The meaning, however, of these representations as a whole remains elusive so long as we do not know the objects' function.

The decorated Bawit fragments and the undecorated Kellia examples all come from monastic, though not necessarily liturgical, contexts. Decorated (nos 4 and 5) and undecorated examples (Kellia) preserve oil or resin residue in their interior. Although morphologically comparable to the Kellia vases, which Egloff identified as 'eternal' lamps, the Benaki, Louvre, and Petrie Museum vases lack the ring-shaped holders on which Egloff's identification relied. Their use as lighting devices seems *a priori* unlikely, unless the four holes served the dual purpose of redirecting liquid inside the reservoir and holding a wick. There is, however, no trace of burning around the preserved holes. It is also possible that a saucer lamp, similar to those discovered at Kellia,¹¹³ was placed over the large central opening. If the dark film inside no. 4 and on the collar of no. 5 is oil residue (fig. 20), then the use of these objects as lamps is possible. But even if the material is bitumen or resin, as the dark, shiny droplets on no. 5 suggest, these materials might have been used to line the interior of the vases thus preventing the oil from seeping through and damaging the elaborate painted decoration. The four holes should collect any oil spilt during the filling of the saucer lamp or of small containers, such as eulogies, assuming that the lamp lit a *locus sanctus*, an important tomb, or a venerated icon. One of the Louvre vases (no. 3) was, in fact, first published as a lamp and compared to Middle Byzantine suspension lamps.¹¹⁴

Although its general form vaguely recalls Early Byzantine kantharos-shaped lamps and Islamic mosque lamps, which were normally suspended, a device of this type would have been better suited for standing on a level surface, since its considerable weight when filled with oil would render suspension a perilous task.¹¹⁵ If these objects were indeed used as lamps (ordinary or ‘eternal’), their iconography would befit their function, as light, through its association with Christ, was believed to express protection and salvation.¹¹⁶ A lamp intended to honour a sacred space, image, or relic would also agree with the iconography of no. 4.

Another possible function suggested by Christiane Lyon-Caen for the Louvre vases is that of a container for relics, holy bread, or important monastic documents, with a lid firmly attached over the opening by means of twine

strung through the four holes.¹¹⁷ Although the decoration’s prominent apotropaic symbolism seems appropriate for a reliquary, the oil or resin residue does not corroborate such an interpretation. Finally, we cannot definitively exclude the use of these objects in a lay context, such as a household, where apotropaic symbols and celebratory imagery would be equally appropriate.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Bolman 2002a: E. S. Bolman, Theodore, “The Writer of Life”, and the Program of 1232/1233, in: E. S. Bolman (ed.), *Monastic Visions. Wall Painting in the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea* (New Haven – London 2002) 37-76.
- Bolman 2002b: E. S. Bolman, Theodore’s Program in Context. Egypt and the Mediterranean Region, in: E. S. Bolman (ed.), *Monastic Visions. Wall Painting in the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea* (New Haven – London 2002) 91-102.
- Clédat 1904: J. Clédat, *Le monastère et la nécropole de Baouit, Mémoires de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire* 12 (1904).
- Clédat 1999: J. Clédat, *Le monastère et la nécropole de Baouit, Mémoires de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire* 111 (1999).
- Egloff 1977: M. Egloff, *Kellia, La poterie copte, Quatre siècles d’artisanat et d’échanges en Basse-Égypte, Recherches Suisses d’Archéologie Copte* III, 1 (1977).
- Leroy 1974: J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits coptes et coptes-arabes illustrés* (Paris 1974).
- Leroy 1975: J. Leroy, *Les peintures des couvents du désert d’Esna, La peinture murale chez les coptes* I (Cairo 1975).

- Lewis 1973: S. Lewis, The Iconography of the Coptic Horseman in Byzantine Egypt, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* X (1973) 27-63.
- Lucchesi-Palli 1982: E. Lucchesi-Palli, Some Parallels to the Figure of St Mercurius at Faras, in: *Nubian Studies (Acts of the symposium held at Cambridge 1978)* (Warmminster 1982).
- Lyon-Caen 2000: C. Lyon-Caen, La vaisselle de céramique à la section copte du Musée du Louvre, in: A. Boud’hors, *Études coptes VI, Huitième journée d’études (Colmar, 29-31 mai 1997), Cahiers de la bibliothèque copte* 11 (Paris – Louvain 2000) 51-57.
- Lyon-Caen 2006: C. Lyon-Caen, Problèmes d’identification d’un récipient à la section copte du Musée du Louvre, in: A. Boud’hors – J. Gasco – D. Vaillancourt (eds), *Études coptes IX, Onzième journée d’études (Strasbourg, 12-14 juin 2003), Cahiers de la bibliothèque copte* 14 (Paris 2006) 247-63.
- Metzger et al. 1989: C. Metzger – D. Bénazeth – J. Durand, *Écllosion de l’art chrétien* (Paris 1989).
- Milne 1898: J. G. Milne, *A History of Egypt. 5. Egypt under Roman Rule* (London 1898).
- Milne³1924: J. G. Milne, *A History of Egypt under Roman Rule* (London³1924).

- Murray 1935: M. A. Murray, *Coptic Painted Pottery, Ancient Egypt and the Near East* (June 1935) 1-15.
- Neyret 1979: Cl. Neyret, Un vase copte inédit du Musée du Louvre, in: *Hommages à la mémoire de Serge Sauneron 1927-1976, II*, Égypte post-pharaonique, Bibliothèque d'étude LXXXII (Cairo 1979) 187-89.
- Papaconstantinou 2001: A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides. L'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* (Paris 2001).
- Pancaroglu 2004: O. Pancaroglu, The Itinerant Dragon-Slayer: Forging Paths of Image and Identity in Medieval Anatolia, *Gesta* 43/2 (2004) 151-64.
- Piankoff 1935: M. A. Piankoff, Une lampe copte du Musée du Louvre, *Revue du Louvre* II (1935) 37-41.
- Quibell 1912: J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1908-9, 1909-10), The monastery of Apa Jeremias*, Institut français d'archéologie orientale IV (Cairo 1912).
- Rutschowskaya 2004: M.-H. Rutschowskaya, *Le châte de Sabine, Chef-d'œuvre de l'art copte* (Paris 2004).
- Teasley Trope et al. 2005: B. Teasley Trope – S. Quirke – P. Lacovara, *Excavating Egypt. Great discoveries from the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London* (Atlanta 2005).
- Wilber 1940: D. N. Wilber, The Coptic Frescoes of Saint Menas at Medinet Habu, *The Art Bulletin* 22/2 (June 1940) 86-103.

NOTES

* I wish to thank Dr Anastasia Drandaki and Ms Mara Verykokou (Benaki Museum), Ms Dominique Bénazeth and Ms Christiane Lyon-Caen (Musée du Louvre), and Dr Stephen Quirke and Ms Suzanna Pancaldo (Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology) for permission to publish material from the collections that they curate, for facilitating my work in the museums, and for useful discussions; Dr Alexandra Konstantinidou and Dr Fatma Mahmoud for sharing information on unpublished parallels from Bawit and the Coptic Museum in Cairo respectively; Dr Sonali Gupta for information on Egyptian pottery fabrics; Professor Elizabeth Bolman, Dr Brigitte Pitarakis, and Professor Thanassis Semoglou for discussing iconography and function. Nikos Xanthopoulos helped with the digital drawings. All photographs and drawings are by the author unless otherwise stated. All measurements are in centimetres.

1. Stephen Quirke, curator at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, informs me (private correspondence, 20/09/2010) that the archival publication of Petrie's pocket notebooks, which include acquisition notes, is pending. Meanwhile, he suspects that, because no. 5 (UC19481) was published by Joseph Grafton Milne in 1898 (Milne 1898, 113), it was acquired before that date and probably not earlier than December 1880, when Petrie first visited Egypt. The same may apply for nos 6 (UC19480) and 7 (UC19482). Quirke wonders if the pieces may not have once belonged to Amelia Edwards's Egyptian collection, assembled between 1873 and 1892, although he has no evidence that she acquired Coptic material.

2. Inv. no. 10420. Of similar shape, size, manufacture, and style, this vase is under publication by Dr Fatma Mahmoud, who most kindly provided me with a photograph and relevant information.

3. Excavations directed by Dr Gisèle Hadji-Minaglou for the Institut français d'archéologie orientale in Cairo. Pottery under publication by Dr Alexandra Konstantinidou and Dr Anna Poludnikiewicz, whom I wish to thank for sharing this information.

4. Egloff 1977, 165-66, no. 322, pl. 34, 1-2, 86, 1: H. 29.6, rim diam. 10.8, collar diam. 26.1, base diam. 17.4, oil capacity 7.37 litres (approximate weight 13 kg); from a service room next to the kitchen. Comparison of measurements of no. 3 / Egloff 1977, no. 322: H. 27.7/29.6, interior rim diam. 10.8/10.8, collar rim diam. 26.3/26.1.

5. Egloff 1977, 165, no. 323, 165, pl. 34.3-4, 87.1-2 (three collar fragments: collar diam. 27); no. 324, 165, pl. 87.3 (part of the bell-shaped body and base preserved, impressed geometric decoration: base diam. 16.8).

6. F. Daumas – A. Guillaumont, *Kellia I, Kom 219. Fouilles exécutées en 1964 et 1965* (Cairo 1969) pl. LIV, c et x (only one annular holder preserved). According to Egloff 1977, 165, an object from a seventh-century house at Ahnas el-Medinet (Ehnasya), described by Petrie as "a curious pan with four cups on the brim of it, united at the top by cross handles", might be a similar vase [W. M. F. Petrie, *Ehnasya 1904* (London 1905) 30, pl. XXX, 23].

7. On metal polykandela see M. Xanthopoulou, *Les lampes en bronze à l'époque paléochrétienne*, Bibliothèque de l'antiquité tardive 16 (Turnhout 2010) 46-53. On multinozzled lamps and chandeliers also see L. Bouras – M. Parani, *Lighting in Early Byzantium, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection Publications* 11 (2008) 11-14.

8. Egloff 1977, 166, n. 1: the reservoir of no. 322 holds enough oil to feed four wicks for three weeks. The use, however, of conical glass inserts with such a device seems rather incongruous.

9. For examples see Xanthopoulou (n. 7) 70.
10. P. Maraval, *Égypte, Journal de voyage*, Sources chrétiennes 296 (Paris 1982) 195 and 239, n. 5; Bouras – Parani (n. 7) 23-24.
11. In wall painting, see for example, the decoration of Chapel LI at Bawit (Clédât 1999, 130-31, figs 115-16) or of the haikal of Benjamin at Deir Abu Makar in the Wadi Natroun (ninth-tenth centuries), showing John the Baptist and apostles under arcades [J. Leroy, *Les peintures des couvents du Ouadi Natroun, La Peinture murale chez les Coptes*, 2, MIFAO 101 (1982) pl. II-III].
12. See in particular the medallions with birds, floral motifs, crosses, and star-shaped christograms in the haikal of Benjamin at the Monastery of Abou Maqar in the Wadi Natroun (Leroy 1975, pl. V-VII; ninth-tenth centuries) or the medallions with prophets, birds, and geometric motifs decorating the arches at Deir el Fakhouri in the Esna desert (Leroy 1975, pls 52, 70-71, 78-79).
13. W. Godlewski, *Deir el Bahari V. Le Monastère de Saint-Phoibamon* (Warsaw 1986) 116-17; J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1907-1908)*, Institut français d'archéologie orientale III (1909) pl. XXIII.1-2, 4, XXVII.1.
14. See for example the basket capitals from Saqqara (Quibell 1912, pl. XXXVI, 4) and Bawit (Clédât 1999), 220-21, figs 210-15). For a similarly shaped basket from Karanis see E. Dauterman Maguire – H. P. Maguire – M. J. Duncan-Flowers, *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House* (Urbana – Chicago 1989) 105, no. 42. For the use of this design on textiles see for example E. Dauterman Maguire, *Weavings from Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic Egypt: The Rich Life and the Dance* (Illinois 1999) 128-29, n. B29-B30 (with interspersed 'roundels' filled with crosses, which recall the design on no. 3).
15. L. Török, *After the Pharaohs. Treasures of Coptic art from Egyptian collections* (exhibition catalogue, Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest 2005) 222-23, no. 149.
16. From Kellia, Kôm 219 [Daumas – Guillaumont (n. 6) pl. 26, b and LV, a-b: two faces, one smiling and one frowning, with circular relief eyes identical to those of the busts of no. 5], Antinoe [M. C. Guidotti, La ceramica, in: L. del Francia (ed.), *Antinoe cent'anni dopo* (Florence 1998) 121-33, 48, fig. 81: from the north cemetery, with similar circular eyes], Wadi Sarga (British Museum, inv. no. EA 73196: complete jar with two faces on neck), Saqqara (Quibell 1912, pl. XLVIII, 5: neck with one face).
17. Dauterman Maguire *et al.* (n. 14) 13.
18. *Late Egyptian and Coptic Art. An Introduction to the Collections in the Brooklyn Museum* (New York 1943) 21, pl. 40.
19. Clédât 1999, 53-54, figs 53, 58.
20. See for example an Ethiopian woman photographed in Lalibela with cross tattoos on the forehead and chin and 'necklace' tattoos (photograph by Chris Rainier, National Geographic Society).
21. G. J. Tassie, Identifying the Practice of Tattooing in Ancient Egypt and Nubia, *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 14 (2003) 85-101, 91, 96.
22. O. F. A. Meinardus, *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages* (Cairo – New York 2003) 265.
23. For example, the flute player on a fourth-fifth-century wall hanging from Antinoe (Cairo, Coptic Museum, inv. no. 7948).
24. Dauterman Maguire *et al.* (n. 14) 222.
25. H. Hickmann, Miscellanea Musicologica, X, Le tambourin rectangulaire du Nouvel Empire, *Annales du Service des antiquités de l'Égypte* 51 (1951) 317-33. Frame drums are often present in banquet scenes and in representations of funerary rituals, where they are always played by women.
26. Teasley Trope *et al.* 2005, 172.
27. Lutes with a large pear-shaped sound box and short neck are depicted, for example, in the hippodrome scene in Saint Sophia at Kiev [E. Dauterman Maguire – H. Maguire, *Other Icons. Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture* (Princeton, NJ 2007) 32, fig. 28] and on the silver Beryozovo bowl and Tartu lid [V. P. Darkevich, *Svetskoe iskusstvo Bizantii. Proizvedeniia Bizantskogo hudoestvenno remesla v vostochno Evrope X-XIII veka* (Moscow 1975) 87, fig. 120, 92, fig. 133, 93, fig. 137 and 105, fig. 167: both in the Hermitage Museum and dated to the second half of the twelfth-century]. For representations of the Arab lute or oud see, for example, an eighth-century wall painting from the Umayyad palace Qasr al-Hayr al-Ghabri (West) in Syria, now in the National Museum of Damascus [G. Fowden, *Qusayr 'Amra. Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2004) 95, fig. 31], the tenth-century ivory casket of al-Mughira from Cordoba (Bargello Museum), and a twelfth-century Fatimid ivory plaque from Cairo (Louvre) [W. Denny, Music and Musicians in Islamic Art, *Asian Music* 17/1 (1985) 37-68, pl. 2, 11]. For the medieval Arab lute, for which the earliest known specifications date to the ninth century, also see C. Bouterse, Reconstructing the Medieval Arabic Lute: A Reconsideration of Farmer's Structure of the Arabic and Persian Lute, *The Galpin Society Journal* 32 (1979) 2-9, particularly fig. 1 (with drawings of representations in manuscripts and the Capella Palatina at Palermo).
28. A. Badawi, *Coptic Art and Archaeology: The Art of the Christian Egyptians from the Late Antique to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass. – London 1978) 357; R. Eichmann, *Koptische Lauten. Eine musikarchäologische Untersuchung von sieben Langhalslauten des 3.-9. Jh. n. Chr. aus Ägypten*, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Kairo, Sonder-schrift 27 (Mainz 1994). Examples found in excavations include the sixth/seventh-century lutes from the Monastery of Apa Jeremias at Saqqara (Quibell 1912, pl. LVII) and from a tomb at Antinoe [F. Calament – R. Eichmann – C. Vendries (eds), *Le luth dans l'Égypte byzantine. La tombe de la « Prophétesse » d'Antinoé au musée de Grenoble, Orient Archäologie, Studien zur Musikarchäologie*, Deutsches

Archäologisches Institut (forthcoming)].

29. R. Eichmann, Zwei Schalen-Spiesslauten au seiner spätzeitlichen Nekropole bei Abusir el-Meleq, *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 29/30 (1987/1988) 7-36, fig. 22a.

30. Benaki Museum, Collection of Islamic Art, inv. no. ΓΕ 8496 [M. Evangelatou – H. Papastavrou – P.-T. Skotti (eds), *Byzantium: An Oecumenical Empire, Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum, October 2001-January 2002* (exhibition catalogue, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens 2001) 288, no. 153].

31. H. Hickmann, La trompette dans l'Égypte ancienne, *Annales du Service des antiquités de l'Égypte*, Suppl. 1 (Cairo 1946) 1-75.

32. V. P. Darkevich, *Khudozhestvennyi metall Vostoka VIII-XIII vv. Proizvedeniia vostochnoi toreutiki na territorii evropeiskoi chasti SSSR i Zaural'ia* (Moscow 1976) no. 71, pl. 7, 41-42.

33. Papaconstantinou 2001, 237 ff.

34. On the iconography of the Coptic horseman see K.-H. Brune, *Der koptische Reiter: Jäger, König, Heiliger. Ikonographische und stilistische Untersuchung zu den Reiterdarstellungen im spätantiken Ägypten und die Frage ihres "Volkskunstcharakters"*, *Arbeiten zum spätantiken und koptischen Ägypten* 11 (Altenberge 1999); Lewis 1973, 33 ff; Dauterman Maguire *et al.* (n. 14) 25-28. On the tradition of Horus/Harpocrates on also horseback see S. I. Johnston, Riders in the Sky: Cavalier Gods and Theurgic Salvation in the Second Century A.D., *Classical Philology* 87, 4 (1992) 303-21, 308-09. The basic concept of gods and heroes defeating monstrous beasts may be ultimately traced to Greco-Roman and ancient Near Eastern mythologies (see Johnston, *op. cit.*). On the relation between Christian warrior saints and pagan horsemen see C. Walter, The Thracian Horseman: Ancestor of the Warrior Saints?, *Byzantinische Forschungen* XIV (1989) 659-73.

35. D. Bénazeth, *Chevaux et cavaliers arabes dans les arts d'Orient et d'Occident* (Paris 2002) 59, n. 22.

36. Neyret 1979, 189; Papaconstantinou 2001, 238. Compare the Byzantine amulets and tokens depicting the holy rider spearing a serpent: J. Nesbitt, Apotropaic devices on Byzantine lead seals and tokens in the Collections of Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art, in: C. Entwistle (ed.), *Through a Glass Brightly: Studies in Byzantine and Medieval Art and Archaeology Presented to David Buckton* (Oxford 2003) 107-13, 107-09, figs 13.2, 13.6, 13.10. According to another interpretation, the concept of killing a serpentine adversary stems from Roman imperial iconography and was used for the first time to symbolize Constantine's victory over Licinius, see Lewis 1973, 54, who refers to A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Paris 1936) 43-44, 130.

37. In fact, according to Lewis 1973, 63, they become dominant after the Arab conquest.

38. Lewis 1973, 54, fig. 28.

39. J. Spier, Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their

Tradition, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* LVI (1993) 25-62, 33 ff.

40. Papaconstantinou 2001, 237-38.

41. Pancaroğlu 2004, 152-53.

42. Clédar 1904, pl. LV above.

43. Lewis 1973, 60, fig. 30.

44. Bolman 2002b, 91, 99.

45. Clédar 1904, 75, 80-81, 135, pl. XXXIX, LII, LV above, LXXVI; Clédar 1999, 125, figs 102-03, 126, fig. 104, 162-64, figs 138-39, 141.

46. Quibell 1912, 8, 107.

47. Excavated by an Italian expedition: G. Bagnani, Gli Scavi di Tebtunis (Cronaca), *Bollettino d'arte* XXVII (1933) 119-34, 128, fig. 15 and colour plate next to page 122.

48. Excavated by B. Grenfell and A. Hunt, this building was recorded but not preserved: C. C. Walters, Christian Paintings from Tebtunis, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 75 (1989) 191-208, 193ff, pl. XVIII-XX (one figure might depict Sisinnios; the other is identified by the author as Merkourios without sufficient evidence in my opinion); Bolman 2002a, 44, fig. 4.30.

49. Leroy (n. 11) 123, pl. IV, A-B.

50. Bolman 2002b, 93, n. 19, with reference to W. Godlewski, Deir el Naqlun. Topography and tentative history, in: *Archeologia e papyri nel Fayum: Storia della ricerca, problemi e prospettive, Atti del convegno internazionale, Syracuse, Italy, May 24-25, 1996* (Syracuse 1997) 123-45, 129.

51. Leroy 1975, 14-16, pls 40-48.

52. Bolman 2002a, 40-47, 61-62.

53. Meinardus (n. 22) 34.

54. See for example Leroy 1974, pl. 37 (Pierpont Morgan Library M. 613: Saint Ptolemy), 105.1 and 105.2 (Vatican, Copto 66, fol. 210v: Saint Theodore Stratelates; 287v: Saint Merkourios), 106.2 (Manchester, Ryland's Library, Coptic S. 33: Saint Menas), 107.2 (Pierpont Morgan Library M. 613: Saint Theodore).

55. Lewis 1973, 62.

56. H. Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton 1996) 120-23, 124-27; Pancaroğlu 2004, 153.

57. In the Tebtunis basilica, the four equestrian saints decorate the west (entrance) wall [Bagnani (n. 47) 128, fig. 15]; at Deir al-Shohada, Claudius, Theodore Stratelates, and George (?) occupy the three main panels of the entrance to the haikal (Leroy 1975, fig. 1, nos 6-8). At Saint Antony's, Saints Merkourios and George are depicted on the sidewalls of the khurus (Bolman 2002a, 61). Compare the image of the equestrian Saints George and Theodore spearing a two-headed dragon over the entrance of the funerary chapel of the tenth-century Yılanlı Kilise in Cappadocia (Pancaroğlu 2004, 155, fig. 4).

58. For an example Wilber 1940, fig. 6.

59. P. Ballet, *La céramique. Contextes et classification*, in: P. Ballet – N. Bosson – M. Rassart-Debergh, *Kellia II. L'ermitage copte QR 195. 2. La céramique, les inscriptions, les décors* (Cairo 2003) 3-207, 102-03, 110, n. 55; M. C. Guidotti – L. Pesì, *La ceramica da Antinoe nell'Istituto Papirologico «C. Vitelli»* (Florence 2004) 66, 129, pl. XVIII.

60. Traditionally associated with dragon slaying, Saint George did not acquire this miracle before the eleventh century (Pancaroglu 2004, 153). Until then, but also later, he was represented in the act of dispatching a male figure, be it the tyrant ruler Diocletian, as on a ninth- or tenth-century triptych at Saint Catherine's on Mount Sinai [K. Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai: The Icons, I, From the Sixth to the Tenth Century* (Princeton 1976) 72-73, B.44, pls XXIX, XCVII; according to Weitzman, *ibid.*, 72, and Pancaroglu 2004, 162, n. 17, the image of Saint George on horseback slaying a tyrant emperor often identified as Diocletian was particularly prevalent in Medieval Georgia), the evil general Euhios, who, according to legend, was sent to destroy the saint's sanctuary, as in the paintings in the khurus of the church in the Monastery of Saint Antony (1232/3) (Bolman 2002a, 61, figs 6.24, 7.31), or a Jew, as in a second portrait in the nave of the church at Saint Anthony's [P. Van Moorsel, *Les peintures du monastère de Saint-Antoine près de la Mer Rouge* (Cairo 1995) 153-55, pls 89-90; Bolman 2002a, 41, figs 4.5, 7.22]. Despite his popularity, he was not portrayed as often in Egypt, particularly in the earlier centuries, and is absent from Bawit, where other lesser equestrian saints appear. The second candidate, Claudius, is depicted spearing a small human figure on two occasions: at Deir al-Shohada in the Esna desert (1129/30 or 1179/80), where a youthful and beardless Claudius (his appearance corresponds to his description in texts) defeats an anonymous foe (Leroy 1975, 14, 58-59, pls 40-43) and at Saint Antony's (1232/3), where the foe is identified by inscription as Diocletian, under whom Claudius was martyred at Antinoe (Bolman 2002a, 44, figs 4.12, 4.13).

61. Papaconstantinou 2001, 145-46; O. F. A. Meinardus, *St. Mercurius Abû's-Saifain. A Study of Cult and Art*, *Studia Christiana Orientalia – Collectanea XV* (1972-1973) 107-19. On Merkourios's sobriquet see Bolman 2002a, 61, n. 121.

62. L. S. B. MacCoull, *Sinai Icon B.49: Egypt and Iconoclasm*, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32/5 (1982) 407-14, 408.

63. Papaconstantinou 2001, 146.

64. Leroy 1974, fig. 105.1.

65. Weitzmann (n. 60) 78-79, B.49, pls XXXI, CIV; MacCoull (n. 62).

66. Bolman 2002b, 93 and n. 19.

67. Bolman 2002a, 61, fig. 4.26.

68. Piankoff 1935, 39; Neyret 1979, 188; Lyon-Caen 2006, 251. A textile, probably from Panopolis, now in the Fogg Art Museum, portrays the saint with a pointed beard, holding a

lance in his left hand, accompanied by the inscription ὁ ἅγιος Θεόδωρος [K. Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art, 3rd to 7th Century* (exhibition catalogue, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York – Princeton, NJ 1979) 549-50, n. 494].

69. C. Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (London 2003) 44 ff; Papaconstantinou 2001, 96 ff.

70. On the possible pre-iconoclastic origins of the dragon-slaying legend and iconography of Theodore Tyron see C. Walter, *Saint Theodore and the Dragon*, in: C. Entwistle (ed.), *Through a Glass Brightly: Studies in Byzantine and Medieval Art and Archaeology Presented to David Buckton* (Oxford 2003) 95-106.

71. Papaconstantinou 2001, 99.

72. Papaconstantinou 2001, 100.

73. Outside of Egypt, the earliest dated and identified equestrian representation of Saint Theodore spearing a dragon is a relief on the exterior of the Armenian Church of the Holy Cross at Aghtamar (915-21) (Walter 2003, 99; Pancaroglu 2004, 153).

74. Quibell 1912, 21, 102 (Saq 325) (Room 1735: slaying the dragon), 8, 107 (Saq 342) (Room 1776: on horseback).

75. Weitzmann (n. 60) 71-73, B.43, pls XXIX, XCVII (the other leaf depicts Saint George impaling a human figure).

76. Walters (n. 48) 193-194, pl. XVIII; Bolman 2002a, 44, fig. 4.10. According to Bolman 2002b, 93, the date may not apply to the entire group of paintings.

77. Leroy 1974, 184-85, pl. 105.2; Bolman 2002a, 44, fig. 4.11.

78. Leroy 1975, 15-16, 60, pls 44-48. The short-bearded third saint is tentatively identified as saint George because of the accompanying dedicatory inscription. The image of Saint Theodore is dated by inscription to 1123/4 or 1179/80, and the same date probably applies to the other two.

79. Van Moorsel (n. 60) 157-60, pls 93-94 (Theodore Stratelates), 164-165 (Theodore the Anatolian); Bolman 2002a, 42-44, figs 4.8, 4.9.

80. W. Lyster, *Reflections of the temporal world. Secular elements in Theodore's program*, in: E. S. Bolman (ed.), *Monastic Visions. Wall Painting in the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea* (New Haven – London 2002) 103-25, 118, fig. 7.28.

81. Leroy 1974, 190-91, pl. 37 (Pierpont Morgan Library M 581).

82. D. L. E. O'Leary, *The Saints of Egypt* (London – New York 1937) 240.

83. O'Leary (n. 82) 217-18; Papaconstantinou 2001, 165.

84. Papaconstantinou 2001, 167.

85. For examples from Abbasid contexts dating up to the mid-ninth century at Istabl 'Antar-Fustat see C. Vogt – G. Bourgeois – M. Schvoerer – P. Gouin – M. Girard – S. Thiébault, *Notes on Some of the Abbasid Amphorae of Istabl*

Antar-Fustat (Egypt), *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 326 (May 2002) 65-80, 66. Their typical contents was wine.

86. The garments of the apostles on the Cairo vase recall the densely pleated pallium of the anonymous saint depicted in a Coptic manuscript of the Coptic Museum in Cairo (Leroy 1974, pl. 27.1: Coptic Museum, 3852).

87. Leroy 1974, 92-94, pl. 28.1 (Saint Petersburg, Public Library, Arabic manuscript N, fol. 327).

88. Leroy (n. 11) pl. II-III; Quibell 1912, 106, pl. XXXI.6.

89. Dauterman Maguire *et al.* (n. 27), 10; Dauterman Maguire (n. 14) 27. On the Nile's significance for Christian viewers see H. Maguire, The Nile and the Rivers of Paradise, in: M. Piccirillo – E. Alliata (eds), *The Madaba Map Centenary, 1897-1997: Travelling through the Byzantine Umayyad Period, Proceedings of the International Conference held in Amman, 7-9 April, 1997* (Jerusalem 1999) 179-84. A comparable frieze decorates a carved wood panel now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo [Török (n. 15) 125, n. 66].

90. Lewis 1973, 53: "[...] particularly in Egypt where the life-giving significance of all water birds from the eternal Nile created a powerful syncretism".

91. See for example a funerary stele depicting two orant figures (the deceased) under arcades, now in the Louvre and dated to the late fourth – mid-sixth century [*Au fil du Nil, couleurs de l'Égypte chrétienne* (exhibition catalogue, Musée Dobrée, Paris 2001) 81, n. 51].

92. Papaconstantinou 2001, 146-54; Walter (n. 34) 181-90. The literary and iconographic motif of the equestrian Saint Menas in military dress probably developed as Menas gradually assimilated the customary characteristics of Egyptian saints, who frequently appear on horseback: Walter (n. 34) 182-83; Wilber 1940, 90.

93. Wall painting: Kellia (Kôm 219) [Daumas – Guillaumont (n. 6) pls 23, e and XXXVIII, b], Kôm Abu Girgeh [F. Cabrol – H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* VI (Paris 1925) part I, col. 1251, fig. 5292], probably also Bawit [J. Maspero, *Fouilles exécutées à Baouît*, Mémoires de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire LIX (1931) XLI: only the feet, the edge of the tunic, and four camels are preserved]. Also see a marble relief probably from the ruins of the monastery of Saint Thecla at Dechele [Weitzmann (n. 68) 573-74, n. 512], a terracotta relief from Abu Mena [W. Müller-Wiener, Abu Mena, 4, vorläufiger Bericht, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 21 (1966) 171-87, 186, pl. 74: here the iconographical scheme includes a crocodile], and an ivory panel now in Milan [Weitzmann (n. 68) 578, n. 517: an architectural background representing Menas's famous shrine frames the saint and his camels].

94. Weitzmann (n. 68) 575-76, n. 514.

95. Wilber 1940, 95.

96. Papaconstantinou 2001, 148, 152. An orant Saint Menas is associated with an orant Daniel and other saints on a carved

beam dated to the seventh-eighth centuries, now in Berlin [A. Effenberg – H.-G. Severin, *Das Museum für spätantike und byzantinische Kunst Berlin* (Mainz 1992) 184-85, n. 98b].

97. Mentioned in the Louvre's online Coptic pottery catalogue by Clémence Neyret.

98. D. Bénazeth, La sculpture copte, *Dossiers d'archéologie* 226 (September 1997) 27.

99. Leroy 1974, pls 105.1, 105.2, as does Saint Theodore in the Pierpont Morgan Library M. 613 (Leroy 1974, pl. 107).

100. Bolman 2002a, fig. 4.8.

101. Bénazeth (n. 35) 59, n. 22.

102. Leroy 1974, 193, pl. 106.2.

103. Clédat 1904, pls XXXIX, LII.

104. Wilber 1940, fig. 12; Walters (n. 48) pl. XVIII.

105. On the horse of Saint Theodore Stratelates (Bolman 2002a, fig. 4.8).

106. See, for example, a limestone relief from Akmim [J. Strzygowski, *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire. Nos 7001-7394 et 8742-9200. Koptische Kunst* (Vienna 1904) 26-25, fig. 31: dated to the sixth-seventh centuries]. For examples on textiles see Lewis 1973, 30, figs 6, 8, 9, 11, 15, 17.

107. Leroy 1975, pls 41, 45, 47; Lyster (n. 80) 113, fig. 7.19, 7.22, 7.23, 7.25. Of the remaining saints at Saint Antony's, George features entirely Romano-Byzantine dress and horse trappings, Theodore Stratelates combines Romano-Byzantine horse trappings and dress with a Turkish bow, whereas Victor combines Romano-Byzantine horse trappings with Arab civilian dress [Lyster (n. 80) figs 7.15, 7.27, 7.23].

108. Leroy 1974, pl. 31.

109. Wilber 1940, fig. 12.

110. This feature recalls the earlier representations of saints on the wall paintings of the Bawit (Clédat 1904, pl. LXXXV) and Saqqara [J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1906-1907)*, Institut français d'archéologie orientale II (Cairo, 1908) pl. XLI, XLIV] monasteries.

111. Leroy 1974, pl. 35.

112. Török (n. 15) 168-69, nos 114-15.

113. Egloff 1977, 161-63, nos 308-15, pl. 85.

114. Piankoff 1935, 37; Neyret 1979, 187.

115. Compare the kantharos-shaped lamps standing on the templon epistyle on the sixth-century Riha paten, M. Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium. The Kaper Koraon and Related Treasures* (exhibition catalogue, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore 1986) no. 35.

116. Bouras – Parani (n. 7) 26.

117. Lyon-Caen 2006, 255-56.

ΜΑΡΙΑ ΞΑΝΘΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ

Μάρτυρες, μοναχοί και μουσικοί:

δύο αινιγματικά κοπτικά αγγεία στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη και παράλληλά τους

Η μελέτη αυτή πραγματεύεται μικρή ομάδα πανομοιό-
τυπων σχεδόν κοπτικών αγγείων, τα οποία φυλάσσονται
στο Μουσείο Μπενάκη, στο Μουσείο του Λούβρου και
στο Μουσείο Αιγυπτιακών Αρχαιοτήτων Petrie (University
College London) και διακρίνονται για το ιδιαίτερο σχή-
μα τους και τον πλουσιότατο γραπτό τους διάκοσμο. Τα
αγγεία αυτά, για τα οποία έχουν προταθεί διαφορετικές
χρήσεις (φωτιστικά σκεύη, λειψανοθήκες κ.λπ.), φέρουν

παραστάσεις έφιππων στρατιωτικών αγίων, αποστόλων,
δεόμενου αγίου, μοναχού, μουσικών, γυναικείων προτομών
και διαφόρων ζώων σε ποικίλους συνδυασμούς. Μέσα από
ενδελεχή τυπολογική, εικονογραφική και τεχνοτροπική
ανάλυση, επιχειρείται η ταύτιση της χρήσης τους (φωτι-
στικά σκεύη; λειψανοθήκες;), η ερμηνεία του εικονογρα-
φικού προγράμματος στο σύνολό του, καθώς και η χρονο-
λόγηση των αντικειμένων (πιθανώς 9ος-10ος αιώνας).

