

## Floral Mural Paintings of the Holy Virgin Mary Church in Dayr El-Ganadla, Asyut

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### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

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Nature has attracted the Coptic artists through ages. That's obvious in borrowing several floral elements in both their art and architecture. The church of the Holy Virgin Mary is located in El-Ganadla Monastery in the western mountain of Asyut governorate. The church's mural paintings dated back to the sixth century and they were repainted in the eleventh century. The church is richly painted with several unique groups of floral motifs as; olive, grapevine, laurel plant, palm branches, lotus, leaves and rosettes rise from vases. Such floral motifs are of native species with Christian religious significance. This paper attempts to describe and analyze the floral mural paintings of the church. In addition, to identify plants and flowers species shown in the church. The descriptive and analytical research methods have been adopted.

### Introduction

The monastery of El Ganadla lies on the Nile's western bank, against a cliff in the western mountain. It is around twelve kilometers south of Abu Tig City, which follows Asyut governorate in Middle Egypt. The monastery includes a lot of ancient quarries that were utilized as monks' residences in early Christianity. The Monastery was named after the Holy Virgin Mary, and widely known with name El Ganadla Monastery.<sup>1</sup> Previously, it was mistakenly known with the name of St. Abu Maqrufa.<sup>2</sup>

The monastery is surrounded by an enclosure wall and comprises two rock-hewn churches; the older church may date back to the sixth century named after the Holy Virgin Mary, its altar is dedicated to St. Abu Maqrufah, while the newer one dated back to the nineteenth century in the name of Saints Peter and Paul (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> The Holy Virgin Mary church lies to the south of the northern wall, behind the newer church. A narrow and a little entrance is hewn in the rock leads to the church. It is divided into three aisles. The choir lies before the sanctuary.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Somers Clarke, *Christian Antiquities in the Nile Valley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 171.

<sup>2</sup> Rene Georges Coquin, "Dayr Abu Maqrufa and Dayr Al Janadla," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), Vol. III, 705.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred J. Butler, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighboring Countries: Attributed to Abu Salih, the Armenian* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), 250.

<sup>4</sup> Clarke, *Christian Antiquities*, 174.

The iconostasis is formed by older decorated stone works of a vine bunches, scrolls and birds. The ceiling is flat with small carved dome in the middle, about two meters high from the floor. It is supported by a rocky pillar. Its walls are plastered and whitewashed. The architectural elements and mural paintings of the Holy Virgin Church have dated back to the sixth century. The walls, the ceiling and the niches are well decorated with geometrical, floral, and epigraphic decorations. Figural decorations represent Jesus the Christ, apostles, angels and many saints were painted over the sixth century floral decorations probably in the eleventh or twelfth century.<sup>5</sup>

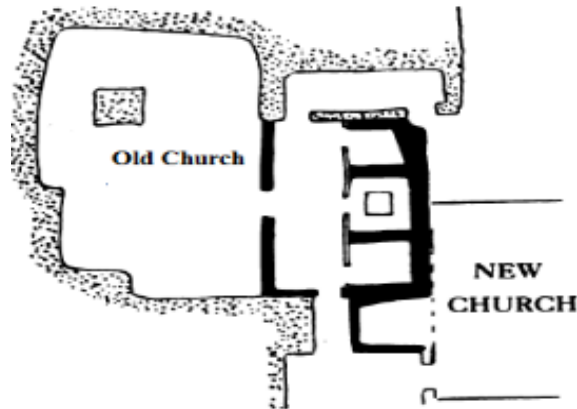


Fig.1. Plan of Al Ganadla Monastery.

After Somers Clarke, *Christian Antiquities in the Nile Valley*, 172.

### Mural painting

Mural painting is one of the oldest types of arts. The oldest example of mural painting dated back to the prehistoric era. It was used to express daily life aspects. In the mural painting process, surfaces must first be prepared to be drained then plastered before the painting stage. In the painting procedure, tempera or fresco techniques were utilized. The primary distinction is that the color medium was applied over a dry surface in tempera technique, whereas fresco technique is utilized when the building surface is still lime.<sup>6</sup>

The Copts inherited the mural art technique from the ancient Egyptians. They started from the fourth century onwards to decorate their constructions with tempera technique. The earliest Coptic mural painting may date back to the end of the third century.<sup>7</sup> Initially, the surface must be smoothed and then plastered. The paint is applied largely when the surface is dry. The used colors were made from pigments combined with water and lime, or with casein binder.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Gawdat Gabra, *The Churches of Egypt: From the Journey of the Holy Family to the Present Day* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 266.

<sup>6</sup> Mona F. Ali and Marian M. Yousef, "An Analytical Study of a Mural with Colorful Geometric Decoration, Coptic Museum, Cairo, Egypt: A Case Study," *Journal of Scientific Culture* 6, no. 3 (2020), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Butler, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, II, 85.

<sup>8</sup> Marguerite Rassart- Debergh, "Painting, Coptic Mural," in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), Vol. VI, 1872-1876.

Floral mural paintings were used as decorative motifs since ancient Egypt and still in use in Greek and Roman Egypt. Some of these decorative motifs were still utilized in the Coptic era with Christian religious significance, while other floral motifs were innovated. The Bible pays a widespread attention to the nature and its interaction with people.<sup>9</sup> The Holy Virgin Mary church in El Ganadla monastery is almost finely decorated with floral, geometrical, and figural designs. The most interesting that the church is wealthy painted with several plant species, roses, branches and leaves of trees. The article deals with such different species of floral motifs applied inside the church. These floral motifs dated back to the sixth Century. The green color is the dominant color used in painting the church.

#### • Floral motifs surrounding arches

Two painted circular arches are painted in the upmost part of the northern wall. Traces of figural paintings which were applied over are clearly seen in the upper parts. It is suggested that a series of such arches are adorned the whole wall but only two arches are still found vivid and the rest have been demolished (Pl. 1).



**Pl.1.** Painted arches on the upper part of northern wall, The Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

Both the shown painted arches are of a circular type. It represents arches rest upon two cylindrical columns with capitals. The first circular painted arch to the left side above the architrave is adorned with two branches of a plant without leaves in both sides are revealing from the architrave. These branches are suggested to be of palm branches. (Pl. 1 a).

The second painted arch is to the right-hand side of the northern wall has been decorated with two branches of plant emerging outside above the architrave. It is suggested that these two branches are of olive branches as the form leaves are typically of olive tree. Moreover, the circular of the arch is finely decorated inside with a series vine leaves intersecting with reddish brown lines. Each vine leaf is painted as separated unit. The branches and leaves are painted with yellow color (Pl.1 b).

<sup>9</sup> Farrin Chwalkowski, *Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture: The Soul of Nature* (UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 3.



**Pl.1 a.** Detail of left-hand side arch,  
The Holy Virgin Mary Church, El  
Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Pl.1 b.** Detail of right-hand side arch,  
The Holy Virgin Mary Church, El  
Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

The third unique carved arch lies in the most upper part of southern wall. It is of a circular arch type of three levels. It is the only well-preserved carved arch inside the church, and it is also suggested the whole upper part of the southern side once decorated with same design arch. The arch and the background are richly ornamented with several rows of vine leaves. They are painted in green color over a white plastered surface (Pl. 2).



**Pl.2.** Carved arch, southern side, The Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla  
Monastery (By the author)

- **Floral motifs decorating niches**

Several niches hewn in the rock have been found on the four sides of the church. They are slightly differing in their height from the ground. They range in case of the used colors are kept bright or faded. Also, they range in size and decoration. Their upper parts are shaped like a gable. Crowns of niches are decorated with carefully decorated floral motifs. All the niches interiors are decorated with a cross (Pl. 3).





**Pl.3.** Niches of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

The first niche is rectangular in shape topped by a gable-shaped crown. It is located in the western wall. It is decorated with a group of six identical flowers inside vases, three in each side. The vase is with a unique form cylindrical shape narrow from the base and with a wider top. The flower forms a heart like shape; two branches emerge from the vase and form a heart shape with one leaf is in the center of the heart. Traces of green color is still seen (Pl.3 a). The second niche's crown is decorated with different floral motifs. It is decorated with a series of green full leaf of a tree intersecting by circular palmettos (Pl.3 b). The third niche's crown is decorated with vine grapes scrolls, and leaves (Pl.3 c).



**Pl.3 a.** Niche of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Pl.3 b.** Niche of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Pl.3 c.** Niche of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

• **Floral motifs decorating the ceiling**

The church's ceiling is unique of its floral decorations. It is divided into several patterns of squares filled in with different floral motifs. Its center is decorated with a small dome decorated with green color resemble niche's tops. Unfortunately, some of these motifs were demolished.



**Pl.4.** Ceiling of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

Flowers emerging from vases are decorating the square patterns of church's ceiling. These flowers are of four branches; two of them leans down and the other two leans towards the top and then to the center. Each branch ends with a unique leaf form. Vase forms are varying; sometimes with cylindrical and others with elliptical tops (Pl.4.a, Pl.4.b).



**Pl.4 a.** Detail of the ceiling of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Pl.4 b.** Detail of the ceiling, of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

Two other different square patterns filled with floral ornamental motifs. The first one is decorated with eight petals flower in two colors white and yellow. It is framed by small dotted circle which is decorated with repeated units of circles intersecting by vine leaves. The four corners of this pattern are decorated with four identical leaves painted from inside with vine leaves. Plant scrolls are joining the four corner leaves (Pl.4.c). The second form of such pattern is identical to the first except the eight petals flowers are substituted by lotus flowers (Pl.4.d).



**Pl.4 c.** Detail of the ceiling, of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Pl.4 d.** Detail of the ceiling, of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

Other floral ornamental cassettes are decorating the ceiling. The first pattern represents four large leaves arranged in a square. Its center is based on a floral design from which emerge four lotus' flowers in the middle between the four leaves. They are differing in colors; two of the leaves with green color and the other two in red color. Also, two of the lotus flowers are with white color and the other two are with red color (Pl.4 e). The other type pattern is shown with eight-sided star pattern with a circular center. Its four corners are decorated with four leaves of a plant (Pl.4 f).





**Pl.4 e.** Detail of the ceiling, of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Pl.4 f.** Detail of the ceiling, of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

A little vault with a green color decorates the middle of the ceiling. It is surrounded within a large square. The corners of this square are demolished except one corner is decorated with a cross in middle of a green laurel wreath (Pl.4 g). The other type represents a large cross enclosed within three circles. In the spaces between the cross arms is a lotus flowers are applied in red color. Four other lotus flowers painted in grey color are surrounding the circle in the four sides.



**Pl.4. g.** Detail of the ceiling, of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Pl.4. h.** Detail of the ceiling, of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



• **Floral motifs decorating the walls**



**Pl.5.** Western wall of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

The upmost part of the western wall is meticulously adorned with repeated units of floral motifs. They are set out in three horizontal rows (Pl.5). The upper row represents repeated units of olive branches and in its midst a cross and four laurel plants in green color (Pl.5 a). The second row represents two registers of vine leaves (Pl.5 b). The third one depicts a series of hexagonal designs with a diverse form of crosses.



**Pl.5 a.** Walls of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Pl.5 b.** Walls of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

**Plants and flowers species painted in the church**

Several species of plants, trees, and roses are shown in the Holy Virgin Mary church as follows.

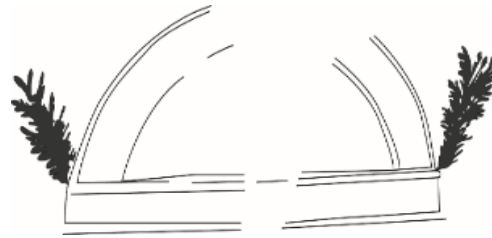
List of painted plants and flowers:	
Olive tree	Grapevine
Lotus flower	Laurel Plant
Pam tree	Roses

### • Olive

Olive trees have been planted since ancient times till now because it's a well-adapted tree to hard environmental circumstances.<sup>10</sup> *Cotinus* or *Olea* are the ancient Greek names for the olive.<sup>11</sup> Olive oil was used in anointing the sick and for lighting. Olive wood was used in the manufacture of household utensils.<sup>12</sup> Through ages olive tree was used to symbolize peace and new life.<sup>13</sup> Similarly in Christian art, Olive symbolizes peace and attributed to Archangel Gabriel particularly in announcement scenes.<sup>14</sup> Doves bearing olive branch symbolize forgiveness and peace. The olive wreath interwoven with the monogram of Christ is symbolizing spiritual victory. Both Olive and palm trees in art refer to blessing and triumph.<sup>15</sup> Olive branches widely used as a decorative motif with a religious significance in the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (Figs. 2, 3). The olive branches are encircled with monogram of Jesus the Christ (Ic ,c) in the top and Alpha and Omega Letters (A w) in the lower parts.<sup>16</sup>



**Fig.2.** Two olive branches of the Holy Virgin Mary



**Fig.3.** Two olive branches of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the

### • Grapevine

Grapevine is a domestic plant in the Egyptian environment since old times. *Vitis* is the Latin name for the grapevine.<sup>17</sup> It was used for the making wine and used as a decorative motif in decorating tombs and temples. In ancient Egypt it was a symbol of god Osiris and refers to god Dionysus in Greek mythology. In Roman and early Christian art grapevine has been one of the popular motifs. In Old Testament, vine

<sup>10</sup> Belul Gixhari, Aljula Gjeloshaj and Nertila Filipi, *Olive in History and Art* (Albania: Agricultural University of Tirana, 2014), 421.

<sup>11</sup> David Gledhill, *The Names of Plants*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2002, 112, 210.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Zohary, *Plants of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 56-57.

<sup>13</sup> "And when the dove comeback to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so, Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth" See: Genesis 8:11.

<sup>14</sup> Clara Erskine Clement, *A Handbook of Christian Symbols and Stories of the Saints* (Boston: Ticknor And Company, 1886), 5.

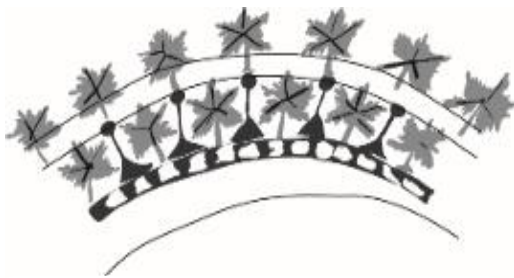
<sup>15</sup> Henry Jenner, *Christian Symbolism* (Chicago: McClure & Company, 1910), 149, 153.

<sup>16</sup> The first and last letters of Greek alphabet used in the church in a way to symbolize the eternity of Jesus the Christ. He is the Alpha and Omega, which refers to the beginning and the end (Rev. 21: 6). See: Tados Yacoub Maltay, *Dictionary of Church Terms*, (Egypt: St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, 1992), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Allen J. Coombes, *Dictionary of Plant Names: Botanical Names and Their Common Name Equivalents*, (Portland: Timber Press, 1994), 191.

refers to the Israel People.<sup>18</sup> In Christian iconography grapevine with bunches were common. The Christ speaks of himself as 'true vine' (John 15: 1-5).<sup>19</sup>

In Coptic art vine leaves, vine scrolls and grapes are widely applied in decorating column capitals and sanctuary screens. It symbolizes Jesus the Christ.<sup>20</sup> Basket with grapes represents the prophets.<sup>21</sup> The grape clusters emerging from a basket indicate the state of the mankind before Christianity. Sometimes the vine leaf refers to the Holy virgin or the church itself.<sup>22</sup> Bunches of grapes with ears of grain symbolize wine and bread of Holy Communion. The grape is a symbol of the blood of the Christ.<sup>23</sup> Vine leaves are widely painted in the church of the Holy Virgin Mary Church in El Ganadla Monastery. It is considered as the dominant floral motif in the mural paintings of the church (Figs. 4, 5)



**Fig.4.** Vine Leaves of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Fig.5.** Two olive branches of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

#### • Lotus flower

Lotus was prevalent along the Nile's banks since ancient times. It has many different significances and usages through ages.<sup>24</sup> Lotus gained its importance because its ornamental, horticulture, and medical usages. It is distinctive with some natural characteristics than any other plant.<sup>25</sup> Two predominate species in Egypt were one with white petals and the other with blue petals.<sup>26</sup> The name Lotus was given to a

<sup>18</sup> Holy Book; Psalm 80:8-16, Isaiah 5:1-77, Jeremiah 2: 21, Ezekiel 15: 1-8; 17:5-10.

<sup>19</sup> Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 59-61.

<sup>20</sup> "I am the true vine, and my father is the husbandman" See: John 15: 1-17.

<sup>21</sup> Clement, *A Handbook of Christian Symbols*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Rehab Mostafa Sharafeldean, "The Ancient Egyptian Origin of Some Architectural and Artistic Elements in Coptic Christianity," *Journal of Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Alexandria University* 16, no. 2 (2019), 54.

<sup>23</sup> George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Coptic Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 31.

<sup>24</sup> Pulok K. Mukherjee et al., "The Sacred Lotus (*Nelumbo Nucifera*)- Phytochemical and Therapeutic Profile," *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* 61, no. 4 (May 2009), 407-408.

<sup>25</sup> Zhongyuan Lin et al., "The Latest Studies on Lotus (*Nelumbo Nucifera*) – an Emerging Horticultural Model Plant," *International Journal of Molecular Sciences* 20, no. 15 (July 2019), 2-4.

<sup>26</sup> Riklef Kandele and Wolfram R. Ullrich, "Symbolism of Plants: examples from European-Mediterranean culture presented with biology and history of art," *Journal of Experimental Botany* 60, no. 9 (2009), 2461-2464.



group of plants range in their locations, usages, and interpretations.<sup>27</sup>The Greeks were first to call the white or the blue water lily by name *lotus* or *Nymphaea lotus*.<sup>28</sup>

In ancient world lotus was well known particularly in ancient Egypt, India, Iran, and China. It was symbol of cultural and believing exchange in ancient world.<sup>29</sup>In Ancient Egypt Lotus symbolizes the sun and continual renewal life. Moreover, the deceased hopes to be transformed into a sacred lotus seeking for the rebirth and eternal life.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, lotus was widely used as a part of different symbols like ankh, Shen, and Samatawy.<sup>31</sup>

Many religious significances were attributed to lotus flower in Christianity. Such it is attributed to the Holy Virgin Mary, Virgin Saints, Archangel Gabriel, and many saints. Moreover, it symbolizes the advent of the Christ.<sup>32</sup>Lotus is obviously seen in the Holy Virgin's Mary Church in El Ganadla Monastery. Four groups of three lotus flowers between the cross and around the circle there are four lotus flowers (Figs. 6, 7).



**Fig.6.** Lotus Flowers of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Fig.7.** Lotus flowers of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

#### • Laurel wreath

Wreath was known as a symbol of victory and kingdom. It's also used to distinguish person's status. It is usually circular in form since ancient Egypt. Roman Emperors used to wear such wreath woven from different plants and leaves. Wreathes of different materials were used in wedding ceremonies and festivals. The idea of making wreathes as a symbol of kingdom dated back to old Persia. Several plants used to be woven as wreathes as Oak, olive, Laurel, vine, and herbs.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Antonello Prigioniero et al., "Plants Named 'Lotus' in Antiquity: Historiography, Biography, and Biogeography and Ethnobotany," *Harvard Papers in Botany* 25, no. 1 (2020), 59-71.

<sup>28</sup> Coombes, *Dictionary of Plant Names*, 110.

<sup>29</sup> Pedram Rezania, "Symbol of lotus in Ancient World," *Life Science Journal* 8, no. 3 (2011), 309-312.

<sup>30</sup> Manfred Lurker, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt: An Illustrated dictionary* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 77-78.

<sup>31</sup> J. Andrew McDonald, "Influences of Egyptian Lotus Symbolism and Ritualistic Practices on Sacral Tree Worship in the Fertile Crescent from 1500 BCE to 200 CE," *Religions* 9, no. 9 (2018), 256.

<sup>32</sup> Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols*, 41-42.

<sup>33</sup> Dragana Rogic et al., "Wreath: its Use and Meaning in Ancient Visual Culture," *Religion and Tolerance, Journal of the center for Empirical Researches on Religion* 10, no. 18, (December 2012), 342.

*Daphne* is the old Greek name of Laurel plant or called in Latin *Laurus*.<sup>34</sup> Generally, laurel tree was a symbol of victory, eternity and purity. Laurel wreath is usually compared with crown of thorns of the Christ.<sup>35</sup> It was related to the Greek myth of Apollo and Daphni. Roman Emperors were usually appeared with laurel wreaths. In Christianity laurel wreath symbolizes triumph over death, salvation, and resurrection.<sup>36</sup> Laurel wreathes are decorating the Holy Virgin's Mary Church in El Ganadla (Fig. 8).



**Fig.8.** Laurel wreath of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

### **Palm trees**

The Greek name of date palm is *Phoenix palmae*.<sup>37</sup> Palm trees have been mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible referring to virtuous persons in the Old Testament<sup>38</sup> and remind the celebration of people of Christ's entry to Jerusalem holding palm branches.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the Bible attested a variety of purposes, including the fruits, the trunk, which is used in ceilings, fences, and rafts of palm trees.<sup>40</sup> In Christian iconography palm trees symbolize both Christ's triumph over sin and victory of martyrs over death.<sup>41</sup> Palm branches appeared surrounding the arches (Pl. 1. a). The palmettos have been used as ornamental motif since the ancient Egypt onwards. Palmettos are also decorating the niches of the Holy Virgin Mary Church in El Ganadla (Pl.3 b).

### **Roses**

The Latin name for various roses is *rosa*.<sup>42</sup> Historically, rose has been symbol of beauty, pride, victory, and love in art. Particularly in Christian art the Crimson rose represents martyrdom, whereas the white rose represents purity. Furthermore, the

<sup>34</sup> Gledhill, *The Names of Plants*, 119, 177.

<sup>35</sup> Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols*, 83.

<sup>36</sup> Rogic, "Wreath," 343-346.

<sup>37</sup> Coombes, *Dictionary of Plant Names*, 142.

<sup>38</sup> "The Righteous Shall flourish like the palm tree: He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." See: Psalm 92:12-14. (King James Version).

<sup>39</sup> "The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, Hosanna!" See: John 12: 12-13.

<sup>40</sup> Zohary, *Plants of the Bible*, 60-61

<sup>41</sup> Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols*, 36.

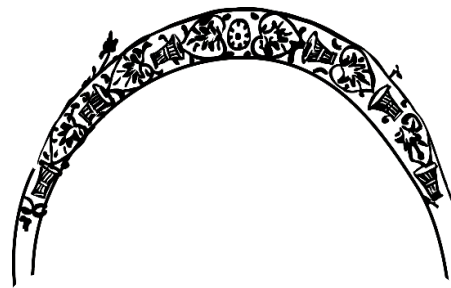
<sup>42</sup> Gledhill, *The Names of Plants*, 251.

beauty of roses conjures up paradise image. The Holy Virgin Mary is widely known as the '*Rose without Thorns*' because she was spared of consequences of the sin.<sup>43</sup>

Additionally, roses symbolize secrecy may be because its petals which are hiding in the center. Based on the rose's colors the interpretation could vary. For example, the red rose refers to male energy, passion, and love, whilst, the white rose symbolizes female energy, innocence, and purity. Compassion and humanity have referred by Yellow rose. Pink is a color associated with friendliness and gratitude. The orange rose is a symbol of joy and hope. Death, depression, and loss are all represented by the black rose, which does not occur in nature. Mary, the mother of Jesus, has long been associated with roses, and rose windows in cathedrals and churches are Her symbol.<sup>44</sup> A unique type of roses widely decorates the Holy Virgin Mary Church (Figs. 9, 10).



**Fig.9.** Rose inside a vase of Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)



**Fig.10.** Roses pattern of the Holy Virgin Mary Church, El Ganadla Monastery (By the author)

## Conclusion

The Holy Virgin Mary Church in Assiut's El-Ganadla monastery is regarded one of the best-preserved churches with its mural paintings since the sixth century. Its drawings are still clear, and the colors are bright and vivid. The church is quite essential to study development of the Coptic art through the sixth and twelfth centuries.

The variety of decorations have been based on floral motifs reflects the great interest of the Coptic artist to the nature particularly in the sixth century. Decorations of this church have been applied by *tempra* technique. The Coptic artist was succeeded in choosing a variety of the used colors, that range and differ coping with the themes of the floral decorations. Cassette patterns are commonly applied in decorating the church ceiling in order to give symmetry and aesthetically scenes.

As a result of analyzing the floral motifs painted on the church, we conclude that most of the plants, roses and trees used are all domestic in Egyptian nature. The concept and the significance of theses floral designs are originated in Christian belief.

<sup>43</sup> Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Adele Nozedar, *The Element Encyclopedia of Secret Signs and Symbols* (London: Harper Element, 2008), 326- 327.



Moreover, they have an aesthetic view. That's obviously appeared in the studied plants as olive, vine, lotus, Laurel plant, and roses. The Olive branch intertwined with monogram of the Christ represents spiritual victory and the palm branches that reveals from the arch refers to peace.

Vine leaves are indicating Jesus the Christ and reflect the great interest to every part of grapevine tree in Christianity. Lotus is a pure Egyptian flower refers to the Holy Virgin Mary and is commonly represented in the Holy Virgin Mary church. Laurel wreath with a cross is applied in reference to salvation, resurrection, and triumph over death. Similarly, palmettos symbolize triumph over the death. Finally, a group of roses are depicted in the church as a sign of beauty, victory, and love.

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## تصوير الزخارف النباتية بكنيسة السيدة العذراء بدير الجنادلة في محافظة أسيوط

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### المخلص

جذبت الطبيعة الفنانين الأقباط عبر العصور، وهذا يتضح جلياً في إستخدامهم للعديد من العناصر النباتية في كلٍ من الفن والعمارة، تقع كنيسة السيدة العذراء مريم بدير الجنادلة بالجبل الغربي بمحافظة أسيوط، ويعود تاريخ المناظر المصورة للكنيسة إلى القرن السادس الميلادي وأعيد زخرفتها مرة أخرى في القرن الحادي عشر. تتميز الكنيسة بأنها مزخرفة بمجموعات فريدة من الزخارف النباتية مثل اشجار الزيتون والعنب والغار وفروع النخيل واللوتس والزهور، وجميع هذه النباتات من الأنواع المحلية المصرية وذات مدلول ديني مسيحي، تقدم هذه الدراسة وصفاً وتحليلاً للزخارف النباتية في الكنيسة، بالإضافة للتعرف على أنواع النباتات والزهور المختلفة، وتم استخدام المنهج الوصفي التحليلي.

### معلومات المقالة

#### الكلمات المفتاحية

الزخارف النباتية؛ السيدة العذراء؛ دير الجنادلة؛ محافظة أسيوط.

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