The Depiction of Sacred Objects of Distributing the Holy Blood in Coptic Mural Painting

Radwa Mahmoud Mohamed Mostafa1
Lecturer, Tourism Guidance Department, Alson Higher Institute for Tourism and Hotels

Zeinab Hanafy Hassan Ali2
Researcher, Coptic Studies Center, Bibliotheca Alexandrina

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ABSTRACT

According to Coptic tradition; The Eucharist is one of the seven sacraments of the Coptic Church. Although all sacraments have their own grace, the Eucharist enjoys the most elevated grace of them all. Bread and Wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. Prophecies of the Christ’s salvation appeared in many verses in both Old and New Testament and as result; Eucharistic scenes were depicted in early Coptic mural paintings to express and confirm the upcoming salvation. This paper aims to study, analyze and trace the depiction of three main objects strongly incorporated in celebrating and demonstrating the holy blood among congregations namely Chalice; Spoon and Napkin in integrate Eucharistic mural painting in Coptic monasteries. Eucharistic scenes were usually depicted in sanctuary walls as figures participate in the actual event taking place on the altar. Chalice and spoon were early main instrument; spoons and napkins were incorporated in a later date and gradually appeared in New Testament scenes.

Introduction

The Eucharist is one of the “Seven Sacraments” in the Coptic Church as it occupies the most elevated grace of them all. In Baptism for instance, water remains water, as does the holy chrism in confirmation, the visible element of the sacraments thus undergoing no change. However, during the Eucharist the bread and the one become no longer mere bread and wine, but the true body and blood of the Christ. Reference to the Christian believe, in the Eucharist God gives his whole self so that the partakers may enter in full and complete communion with him1.

Religious Aspect: The Holy Sacrament or the Eucharist: is the central act of the Christian worship, and One of the seven2 sacraments3 and the greatest sacrament in

2 Number seven had its importance and significance in Christianity; in the Old Testament it symbolizes perfection; number seven is incorporated in many incidents as; the week is seven days, seven days before Noah’s flood, the number of animals on Noah’s ark, seven days till the ark rested after Noah’s flood and Pharaoh’s dream which was interpreted by Jesus the number of cows and grains were also seven. (Gen. 2:2, Gen.7:4: 8:10, 12, Gen. 7:2, Gen.41:2-7).

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the Coptic Church; the word is driven from the Greek Eucharistein means to give thanks also known as the Holy Communion; the precious blood and the redemptive chalice. According to Christian traditions; it is the commemoration of Christ's sacrifice of himself for the redemption of men kind from its sins, during which the transformation of the bread and wine into the blood and flesh of the Christ is accomplished. The Eucharistic prayers for the transformation of the Holy sacrament are accomplished in the church sanctuary. Bread and wine are believed to be shared in God. The priest who serves the Mass and sanctifies the sacrifice is completely responsible for it before God and by the act of the Holy Communion the partakers may enter in full and complete communion with him; according to Christian dogma the Eucharist is meant for all humanity and universal in nature; including the living and the dead.

**Historical Aspect:** A detailed narration of the Last Supper was mentioned more than one time in the New Testament; according to Matthew; Jesus had instituted the Holy Eucharist on Covenant Thursday, while they were sharing their last meal; shortly before his arrest and trial. “And as they were eating, Jesus, having taken the bread and blessed, broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And having taken the cup and given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. For this is my blood, that of the new covenant, that shed for many for remission of sins” (Matt.26:26-28). Words used by the apostles to narrate the same incident they used words like "take," "eat," and "drink," clearly indicate that; the Eucharist should be taken or fed into the mouth and consumed corresponding to the sacred rite practiced in Coptic churches. The first celebration of the Eucharist.

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5. أسس الكنيسة، القاهرة، 1984 ص. 62 حبيب جرجس.

6. السؤال، القاهرة، 1924 ص. 79.

7. F. E. VOKES, “Eucharistia”, *Hermathena* 92, 1958, pp. 31-44.

8. The hikals the sacred rite practiced in the Coptic Church contains the altar; where all the prayers as well as the preparation for the Eucharistic rituals should be held. P. GROSSMANN, "Architectural Elements of the Church", *CE*, 1991, pp. 220-221.


13. متى المسكين، الإفخارستيا عشاء الرب (دخل لشرح القضاء و تطوره من القرن الأول حتى حضرنا الحالى)، القاهرة، 2007 ص. 360.


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occurred when Jesus Christ shared a meal with his apostles on the eve of his Passion\textsuperscript{18}; maybe it was one of the Jewish common religious traditions to be shared with friends or families that used to be celebrated on that day or even the Passover meal itself\textsuperscript{19}.

The earliest Christian communities had repeated a direct imitation of the Last Supper\textsuperscript{20} of Jesus; in addition to the recitation of the “institution narrative” as a central prayer text; By the end of the 1\textsuperscript{st} century A.D.; the Eucharistic rite was separated into a Eucharist (a morning sacramental ritual), and \textit{Agape} (communal supper).\textsuperscript{21,22} The Eucharistic rituals can be interpreted as a meal, shared by early Christian communities\textsuperscript{23}; as a meal it connected with the most basic human needs; and basic practice necessary for life and its nourishment\textsuperscript{24}.

This holy ritual was linked with solemn meal which may have been the paschal meal. The last supper is composed of three main parts: 1- The introductory prayers and the distribution of the bread\textsuperscript{25}, 2- The holy meal itself, 3- The blessing over the last cup of the sacred wine. Jesus the Christ blessed the Eucharistic bread in the beginning of the meal and the Eucharistic wine by the end of the meal\textsuperscript{26}. This service has developed historically out of the last supper of Jesus and his disciples before the crucifixion. This tradition is illustrated by the verses of the New Testament "This is my body ", "this is the new covenant in my blood", and "do this in remembrance of me"(Luk.22:14-20)\textsuperscript{27}. This great event is practiced along with certain instruments on the altar service as a principal element among the church furniture; known by the \textit{Tράπεζα Θύβια}, \textit{γήρίον}\textsuperscript{28} or \textit{μόS}\textsuperscript{29}, while the Coptic altar is usually known by the Lord's Table\textsuperscript{30}. \textit{Isaiah} referred in his prophecy to the altar of Christianity in the land of Egypt; where the living offering is presented to symbol Jesus Christ\textsuperscript{31}.

Two visible elements are incorporated to perform the Eucharist; the bread and the wine. The bread used for the Eucharist should be leavened, unsalted, circular and

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{18} This meal was the last meal of Jesus with his apostles; so it came to be known as the last supper.
\item\textsuperscript{19} B. GOGAN, “Worship for Small Groups-The Eucharist”, \textit{The Furrow} 25/3, 1974, pp. 127-135.
\item\textsuperscript{20} Two principal acts were performed during the Last Supper by Jesus, one of which was the giving of thanks, and the other was the distribution of the elements. G.H. Hamilton, “The Eucharistic Prayer in the Primitive Church” pp. 29-47.
\item\textsuperscript{22} According to St. Paul, the Eucharist was linked with a shared meal, or agape B. GOGAN, “Worship for Small Groups-The Eucharist”, \textit{The Furrow} 25/3, 1974, pp. 127-135.
\item\textsuperscript{23} A. MC. GOWAN “Rethinking Eucharistic Origins”, pp. 173-191.
\item\textsuperscript{24} M. WHELAN, “The Responsible Body: A Eucharistic Community”, pp. 359-378.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Only leavened baked bread made of unsalted wheat flour is used for baking. C.C. WALTERS, \textit{Monastic Archeology}, England, p. 209. Aris & Phillips, 1974
\item\textsuperscript{26} D. J. KILMARTIN, \textit{The Eucharist in the Primitive Church, England}, 1965, p. 143.
\item\textsuperscript{27} E.F.S, “Lord Supper “, p. 451-452.
\item\textsuperscript{28} S. WILLIAM, \textit{A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities I}, London 1876, p.60.
\item\textsuperscript{29} According to Clement of Alexandria; the soul is the true Christian altar (\textit{μόS}) and that the Christianity have no material altars, in later times the same term was used to refer to the Christian altars. S. WILLIAM, \textit{A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities I}, p.60.
\end{itemize}
made of the finest wheat flour; stamped with a wooden cross consisting of twelve little squares; each of which is marked with a diagonal cross; before being baked\textsuperscript{32}; stamped by the Coptic words "The Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal"\textsuperscript{33}. The wheat used for the preparation of the Eucharistic bread; should be of wheat flour. As it was the custom used by the Jews during the time of the Christ. The religious aspect is mentioned in (John 12:24) "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"\textsuperscript{34}.

**Other Elements and Instruments Used to Demonstrate the Holy Blood:**

Eucharistic vessels have to be consecrated before they are first used for the Divine Liturgy; a tradition was first followed in the Old Testament, as God commanded Moses to anoint the tabernacle of the congregation, the altar and its vessels.\textsuperscript{35}\textsuperscript{36} Since Christianity remained illegal until Constantine’s reign\textsuperscript{37} (272-337 A.D), Christians continued to worship in Jewish temples and synagogues, also meeting in private homes to celebrate the “Eucharist” or last supper as there were no proper places for Christian worship yet\textsuperscript{38}; simple materials were first used due to the poor finical sources of the Coptic Church especially during the early days of persecution\textsuperscript{39}; and the continuous plunder of the barbarian tribe; later on vessels were made of silver and other precious materials such as gold studded with precious stones, and were presented as gifts from wealthy people\textsuperscript{40}. Thus; most probably ordinary table ware were used in celebrating the Holy Rite. The ancient cups were more like bowls, wider and shallower than the normal teacup usually made of pottery, or sometimes metal thus the cup used at the Last Supper was maybe was an earthenware bowl, sufficiently large for all to share (Matt. 26:27).\textsuperscript{41} Once Christianity became legal and Constantinople became the center of church life in the eastern Mediterranean, Byzantine emperors lavishly funded the construction of new churches and cathedrals; precious metals became common and pearly chalices were offered by the believers as a love gesture. Sometimes, fathers asked their people not to amplify in offering such valuable chalices while there are many people in terrible need. **St. Clement of Alexandria** vigorously refused using jeweled chalices; while **St. Ambrose** and **St. Chrysostom** blamed the donors of jeweled gold cup.\textsuperscript{42}

**A. Chalice (عَوْضٌ ’لَكَمُّ):** The chalice is the cup used in the celebration of the Eucharist that contain the Christ blood; used to feed the congregations the

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\textsuperscript{32}KHS BURMESTER, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church*, Cairo, 1976, 81.  
\textsuperscript{33}A. BASILIOS, "Eucharist", p.1056-1063.  
\textsuperscript{34} A. BASILIOS, "Eucharist", p.1056-1063.  
\textsuperscript{35}(Exod.30:26-28)  
\textsuperscript{38}القس منقريوس عوض الله، مذارة الأقداس في شرح طقوس الكنيسة القبطية والقدس، ص: 56  

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sacred blood of Jesus the Christ; the chalice enjoyed its symbolism and was deeply associated with the Eucharistic rite and used as one of its symbols; in early days the shape of a lamb can be engraved on one of its sides as a symbol of Jesus the Christ and his sufferings. In the Coptic churches the chalice cup is usually small, long, straight sided and usually made of silver, with a long stem and a circular base; angular base were not commonly used in Coptic Church; Butler has also mentioned that Glass chalices only came into use when precious vessels had been plundered or destroyed about the year 700 A.D; like other Eucharistic vessels chalice used to be made of wood, which later on was replaced by chalices made out of polished copper or iron.

The chalice is used during the celebration of the Eucharist to receive the wine poured from the cruet which has to be filled with water again to refill the chalice with the final mixture, once the chalice was not in use during the liturgical prayers and the consecration of the bread and wine it was placed in the Ark or the altar casket; which is usually decorated by the scene of the last supper.

B. Cruet (kārwrah): it is a small vessel with a lid; only one cruets can be used during the liturgy; from which the wine should be poured inside the chalice, some churches may use two cruets one to contain the wine and other to contain the water added later. Cruets like the other Eucharistic vessels were made of poor materials especially in the early days of persecutions; later on, there were made out of gold or silver and ornamented with crosses or verses from the Gospel.

C. Spoon (malʽakah): they came into use by the 6th century A.D. and are now the method established in the Coptic Church Nowadays they are used for administering the sacred wine to the communicants; it is also used for those who are unable to drink directly from the cup. In the Eastern churches it is used for demonstrating the sacred wine to the congregations.

In early times the communicants used to partake of the wine straight from the chalice; spoons were made of silver, or rarely of gold, it has a long straight handle on which certain biblical verses are inscribed ends by a circular ending to

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42 Priests taking part in the liturgy; are feed the body in the spoon while it is placed on the paten, unlike laymen, who receive the Body in their mouths from the celebrant priest’s hands, followed by the Blood from the spoon. R.F. TAFT, “Byzantine Communion Spoons”, Dumbarton Oaks Papers 50, 1996, pp. 209-238.
contain the sacred blood; it should be noted here that another type of spoons with a slightly different shape was used to remove any defect from the sacred wine before being demonstrated to congregations; most probably this latter kind was not used for the partaking as it has longer handles and broader and shallower bowl.

D. Eucharistic wine (ābārkāh) Copts know the Eucharistic wine by the Arabic term ăbārkāh, meaning "new wine"; which is the wine used for the celebration on the holy rite, dried grapes or raisins were first washed carefully and stored in earthenware pot to be soaked later in water for three days; later on, they were squeezed by hand to extract its juice. The juice is poured into vessels that are not completely filled to allow the process of fermentation; the extracted juice is left for forty days, after which it can fit for the sacramental use, the priest may pour the Eucharistic wine in a cup or a vessel to assure its quality and that it is free from any defect before being used for the sacramental prayers. Water is added and mixed with the sacramental wine as a symbolism of the flow of blood and water from the Christ deep injury on the cross caused by the Romans soldier to emphasis his death.

E. The Chalice Veil, liffah: The altar is usually surrounded by a set of cloth coverings to provide the right veneration during the liturgy; once the church is consecrated, the altar should not be left uncovered; they are the altar veils, chalice veils, mats, paten and chalice veils, and paten veils; the Chalice Veil is usually made of silk, about 42cm. by 42 cm. it is similar in shape and color to the paten veil, used to cover the chalice in the ark on the altar; commonly known in Arabic by the word “lifafah”.

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51 KHS BURMESTER, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church*, p24.
53 The ăbārkāh: is an Arabic corruption of the Greek word “απαρχή”; meaning; the beginning of the sacrifice. The word is commonly used by the Copts to highlight the symbolism of the sacrifice of the Christ among the men kind. G. GAWDAT, *Historical Dictionary of the Coptic Church*, Cairo, 2008, p.13.
55 The monastery of Anba Hadra once contained a chamber used to extract wine contained mats and remaining of crashed grapes, *Monastic Archeology*, p. 216.
56 KHS BURMESTER, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church*, p.82.
58 The Syrians use half water and half wine, while in Greek Church they used more water in cup than the wine: Tadrus Y. Malāṭī, *The Church: The House of God*, p.516.
60 Recent researchers assured that water was not the liquid that fold from Christ’s side on the cross but it was the diaphragm fluid which is similar in colour to water. Dr. Milad Sedky; Unpublished symposium of the Council of Catholic Patriarchs and Bishops entitled “the Holy shroud of Jesus the Christ”.
62 KHS BURMESTER, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church*, Cairo, p23.
F. **Liturical Mat**: another important piece of cloth either square or circular known by mats is used to wrap the Lamb\(^{63}\) (the Body of Christ) and the cruet of wine (the Blood of Christ) during the offertory prayers at the beginning of the liturgy\(^{64}\).

G. **Paten and Chalice Veil**: a rectangular sheet made of silk, measuring about 6 feet by 4 feet (180 by 120 cm). At the beginning of the celebration of the liturgy, this veil remains over the oblations on the altar until the prayers of reconciliation have been said, after which it is removed by the celebrant and a deacon. It is then neatly folded and placed on the altar until the end of the liturgy\(^{65}\).

the believers may go into rooms alongside the altar, men to the left of the sanctuary and women to the right, or sometimes all together in front of the door of the sanctuary\(^{66}\), while Napkins are rectangular pieces of cloth placed on the hands of the believers while receiving the Holy Sacraments. The body of the Christ is placed directly in the mouth of the believer, while the blood is demonstrated by the liturgical spoon. The napkin or the handkerchiefs are then used to prevent the Gifts from falling. They may drink a sip of water to make sure they have consumed all the Gifts\(^{67}\).

**Iconographical Study**

Monastic Churches were regarded as a religious roofed construction to pray and perform services with simple design\(^{68}\), a few exceptions can be seen in the monastery of Saint Shenute and the monastery of Saint Bishoi\(^{69}\). The system in which monastic churches were painted is the usages of scenes from the biblical and monastic world; this system distinguishes the Coptic Church from any other Christian church around the world\(^{70}\). The painted scenes were mostly depicted on the walls of the eastern section of the church; precisely at the altar and the khurus room. As the eastern section of the Coptic Church has a strong symbolic meaning, it is the sacred place where liturgy is preformed, and the main place, which houses the altar\(^{71}\).

Mural paintings in Coptic monasteries reveal information concerning their decor and incorporated rituals; the monastery churches are extensively decorated, and have gone under many alternations and repairs, but contain aspects of the religious life\(^{72}\). Thus,

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\(^{63}\) The lamb: The text is implying to the symbolism relationship between the lamb and the Christ.


\(^{64}\) KHS BURMEISTER, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church*, Cairo, p23.


\(^{68}\) B.T.A. EVETTS, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighboring Countries, Attributed to AbûSâlih the Armenian*, Oxford, 1895, p. 120.


most of the Eucharistic scenes that will be addressed in this paper are located on sanctuary rooms as the monastic paintings executed in the main sanctuary are linked to the same celebration in heaven; patronage and angels depicted on walls are taking a part in this heavenly ceremony according to the Coptic Church the faithful Christian should consume these substances to receive grace and the forgiveness of sins⁷³.

Fig.1. a personification of the church as a woman; holding a chalice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted theme</th>
<th>Chapel XVII-Bawit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Contemporary excavations at the same site were dated to the 6th/7th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dating</strong></td>
<td>6th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description**: A distinguished early Coptic wall painting. It was discovered in by Jean Clédat. It shows as a smiling young lady wearing an elevated ornamented crown decorated with rhombus shapes on the wide strip and surmounted by circular shapes. Also, her thick black hair is ornamented with a string-like beads running down on the hair till the curved end. The facial features are customary Coptic with almond eyes, elongated nose, and a small mouth. The chalice is relatively large with wide opening. The represented lady holds it from the stem while resting her forefinger on its rim. The artist tried to attract the attention to the association between the salvation “represented her in the cup” and the establishment of the church.

Fig. 2. A graffiti, showing the deacon Anthony giving the Eucharist sacred chalice to Anub
After: V. LOON, P. 128.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted theme</th>
<th>A graffiti, showing the deacon Anthony giving the Eucharist sacred chalice to Anub</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>chapel XXXVI - Bawit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>6th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description:** Based on the Fayyumic Coptic written text\(^{74}\); we have two characters; the first one is depicted in a standing attitude in a sanctuary-like construction, wearing the ecclesiastical costumes; with some Coptic crosses decorating his tunic and epitrachelion. The scene shows a deacon in a Eucharistic Orthodox liturgy; offering the holy blood through the chalice and the accompanied text affirms that he is a deacon\(^{75}\) Anthony the deacon is depicted putting his left hand on the node and the base of the communion cup while his right hand is holding it from the handle. Anub the second character is represented with a slightly bent back and about to drink from the cup. He is holding a remarkable object. Taking the context of the whole scene into account, this piece of cloth most probably is “Chalice Veil”. It is very large in size decorated with geometrical motifs and shapes like crosses. The cup itself had a round body, short stem and two handles on both sides. There is a spoon as well but only its handle can be seen.

The text reads as follows:

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\(^{74}\)The Authors would like to extend their sincere gratitude to **Professor Dr. Maher Eissa**, professor of Coptic language, Faculty of Archaeology, Fayoum University for his genuine assistance in reading and translating the Coptic texts.

\(^{75}\) Anthony most probably was an archdeacon not only a deacon to take part in distributing the holy blood. Maybe the writer of the original text miswrote the text or was not knowledgeable enough of Coptic language.
The names of the two characters are mentioned as follows: Deacon Anthony, Amen.

Anthony is his name.

The name of the second character is written above his head as follows:

Anub son of Canteryas.

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**Fig.3.** Jesus Christ as a high priest giving the chalice of communion to his *apostles*

*After:* G. GABRA, Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt. 2014, p. 162.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted theme</th>
<th>The Christ as the high priest giving the chalice of communion to his apostles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>The church of Abo Serga (It is about 25 km south of modern Aswan.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dating</strong></td>
<td>6th-8th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description:** This example is unique, unrepeated, and a crucial composition of Jesus Christ himself leading the holy Eucharist (as the highest priest) and demonstrating the H Blood by himself while probably the apostles are flanking him in a lesser position. Jesus the Christ is represented as the middle main theme; unfortunately, the Christ face has been completely ruined but it can be easily recognized through the cross nimbus surrounding his head.

The demonstration of the Christ is easily noticed through his presentation on a larger scale than the surrounding figures; who are most probably his apostles. He is standing in front of the altar; wearing a red garment. He is also holding the sacred chalice; which seems different “a bit large with two handles yellow with a wide red strip bear the rim. Most probably this scene has the earliest representation of the throne of the chalice. It is illustrated in yellow and placed on the altar.
It is quite prominent here to mention that on the altar there is a yellow circular object, most probably the Holy Bread. The bread and the wine together form the concept of the Holy Communion.

![Wall painting of a flying angel holding the tools of the Eucharist on a paten, Church of Saint Bishoi, The Red Monastery.](https://archnet.org/sites/17025/media_contents/124260,acceesed 28, December, 2021.)

**Fig.4.** Wall painting of a flying angel holding the tools of the Eucharist on a paten, Church of Saint Bishoi, The Red Monastery.

**After:** [https://archnet.org/sites/17025/media_contents/124260,acceesed 28, December, 2021.](https://archnet.org/sites/17025/media_contents/124260,acceesed 28, December, 2021.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted theme</th>
<th>A flying angel holding the tools of the Eucharist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Church of Saint Bishoi, The Red Monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dating</strong></td>
<td>6-7th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description:** A colorful scene of a flying angel holding a paten on which we can witness the illustration of the sacred chalice, the throne of the chalice, and the spoon. The angel is depicted on the arch surmounting the sanctuary. It gives the impression that the angels not only attend the prayers but also participate on the Holy Communion.

The three tools bare the same brown color with recognizable shapes. The chalice is richly decorated consisting of a (base, node, large cup, and two curved handles). The body of the chalice is ornamented with a flower-like motif (close in shape to the pant decorations covering the surrounding area. The illustration of the spoon in this scene is distinguished by its bent neck, the angel is holding it from the handle as if it will be introduced to someone. The representation of the communion throne is pretty simple; consisting of three narrow vertical bands connected with two circular ones from the bottom and the top forming a throne on which on which the chalice rests.

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Fig. 5. A scene of an angel holding a vessel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted theme</th>
<th>an angel holding a vessel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Church of Saint Bishoi, The Red monastery, Sohag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>6-7th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description:** the scene of a flying angel; the outer line of the body is still visible while the head with the halo unfortunately totally demolished. The angel is illustrated with a large vessel and holding it from the base; he extends it in front of him; most probably the scene represents the pouring of the wine as if the angel is about to take a part in the holy Eucharist by pouring the wine into the chalice. The vessel is marked by a relatively elongated pointed tip with partially decorated wide body.

Fig. 6. A scene of the archangel Raphael holding a vessel

### Depicted theme
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>archangel Raphael holding a vessel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Church of Saint Bishoi, The Red monastery, Sohag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dating</strong></td>
<td>6-7th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description**: a scene of the archangel Raphael in a standing position. He is depicted with two hand objects; a long staff and a vessel. The staff is one of the hand objects that symbolizes the authority and was commonly carried by the archangels. The vessel here represents one of the Eucharistic tools. The bottom part of the vessel is partially damaged. Most probably the angel is holding it from the foot. It has a wide decorated body, then an elongated neck with a wide lip.

![Depicted theme](image)

**Fig.7.** The meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted theme</th>
<th>The meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>St.Mark sanctuary, Deir Abu Makar, Wadi El-Natroun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dating</strong></td>
<td>12th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description**: Another example shows the meeting between Abraham and Malechazadek “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all” (Gen. 14:18-20). Abraham is depicted in an intercession body pose; leaning forward with calm facial feature; long white beard and he is looking directly to Melchizedek. The latter is standing in a higher position; depicted as an old man with longer white beard and transparent tunic reaches his arms; holding the chalice with his left hand; while his right is blessing the Eucharistic blood within the chalice. Halos are surmounting the two figures; the whole scene gives the impression that Abraham is about to drink from the chalice. The chalice illustrated here is relatively large with no decoration.

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[https://jaauth.journals.ekb.eg/](https://jaauth.journals.ekb.eg/)
Fig. 8. "The Meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek".  
After: [http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/baramus.htm](http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/baramus.htm), accessed 28 December 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted theme</th>
<th>The meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Church of Virgin Mary, Al- Baramûs Monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>12th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description:** A main scene of a symbolic religious feeding is seen in Deir Al Baramous. The scene expresses the traditional meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek; Abraham is depicted as an old man with white hair and long beard and in a three-quarter pose. Halos are surrounding the head of both men. We can also observe the same usual calm facial features of Melchizedek are depicted; holding the sacred chalice. The sacred chalice is represented with a round bowl and decorated rim, and a simple base bare of decorations; the latter figure is standing in a higher position than that of Abraham. Melchizedek is holding a thin spoon by its handle, while putting the tip into Abraham’s mouth in an actual communion scene.

**Fig. 9.** A Wall painting representing St. Stephen holding a Chalice  
Depicted theme: St. Stephen holding a Chalice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>The Church of the Monastery of St. Matthew the Potter, Esna.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>12th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description: It represents *St. Stephen*76, known as “the first martyr” (Acts7:59), beardless in a standing position.77 His figure is painted in the intrados of the church chapel. The saint is depicted here holding the chalice from its stem with his right hand, while touching the bowl with his first two fingers. The chalice is simple in decoration with an elongated stem and wide cup. An important depiction of a white “napkin”, in Arabic “*lifafah*” which is represented as a piece of cloth with two fine bands at the end a wrapped around the forefinger of the saint. This depiction could be the first of its kind in Coptic art. Most probably the artist is influenced by the introducing of using this piece of cloth in liturgy. This tradition is kept till modern time.

![Image of St. Stephen holding a Chalice](https://jaauth.journals.ekb.eg/)

**Fig.10.** The meeting of Abraham and Melechizedek


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted theme</th>
<th>The meeting of Abraham and Melechizedek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>the central sanctuary of St. Antony church at the Red Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>13th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

76 *St. Stephen*: is an archdeacon who was the first martyr under Diocletian. His feast is on the 1st of Tubah. He is also a leader in the early Jerusalem church whose story appears in (Acts 6:1-8:2). The other references to Stephen is in the New Testament that narrates his story in (Acts11:19; 22:20). His death was associated with the Christ which explains the symbolism of holding a chalice the emblem of salvation. For more information about the life of St. Stephen see: Achtemeier, Paul J., *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, HarperCollins Publishers, 1064-1065.

Description: Melchizedek is depicted on the left side; in a higher position than Abraham who is represented in a three-quarter position; stretching both arms and leaning forward to receive the holy blood from the chalice held by Melchizedek. The size of the chalice is larger than usual surmounted by a decorative band; maybe the artist wanted to attract the viewer to the activity of demonstrating the blood from the sacred chalice. A pair of scissors and a knife a grey blade and a brown handle is placed next to Melchizedek’s right hand; an altar is represented covered with red coverings and is also clearly seen in the main scene confirming the main act of demonstrating the holy blood and supported by the inscriptive line read as follows;” The priesthood of Melchizedek”

Analytical Study

− As for the wall paintings, the depiction of the Holly Eucharistic tools started as early as the 6th century A.D. and it continued to appear till the 13th century A.D.

− The positioning of the scene was in all cases very close to the sanctuary where this special event occurs consequently, the depiction of those figures and characters has its symbolic meaning as this event doesn’t only happen on the earth, but in heaven too. This is how the saints and the angelic creatures could take part in it.

− The Eucharistic scenes were accompanied by Coptic texts only twice. Both of the scenes date to a close period of time and both were discovered in Bawit; the personification of the church (6th, 7th century A.D.) and the communion scene of the archdeacon Anthony (6th century A.D.)

− The instruments were represented carried by: a personification of the church as a lady, the Christ himself as the highest priest, a priest (St. Stephen, an archdeacon (Anthony)-both have ecclesiastical ranks- to take part in distributing whether the holy blood just like in the case of the archdeacon or to distribute both the blood and the bread like the case of St. Stephen, Melchizedek who is considered as a priest, angel, archangel.

− Considering its prominence and main role in the liturgy of the Eucharist, the chalice was the most frequently represented object. According to the scenes discussed in this paper, the chalice appeared 8 out of 10 scenes. It appeared was represented carried by the personified church, St. Stephen, Jesus Christ, Melchizedek, and an angel.

− Throughout the centuries, the chalice was illustrated in different sizes, richly decorated or very simple with not accurate proportions and plain of decoration.

− The actual drinking from the chalice appeared only three times; twice in representing the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek and once with the Christ and the apostles.

− It appeared accompanied by the throne of the chalice, spoon, Chalice Veil. and paten. On the other hand, it was never represented with a vessel.

− In spite of its strong relation to the chalice, the throne of the chalice was not as frequently represented as the chalice.
The two examples are very close to each other, the earliest dates to the 6th century A.D. and the other to the 7th century A.D.

They both took the same exact shape with two different colors.

The Chalice Veil is a distinctive element in the Eucharist. It was only represented twice. Tracing its appearance; the napkin or the Chalice Veil appeared once during the 6th century A.D. (a graffiti scene) in the hand of the one receiving the holy blood. The second time was during the 12th century A.D. With St. Stephen around his fingers.

Despite its humble execution, the 6th century A.D. Chalice Veil was richly decorated with geometrical decorations and dots that take shapes like crosses. The 12th century A.D. Chalice Veil was simple and almost plain of decoration except for two lines forming a band at the bottom and the top.

Between the 6th and the 12th century A.D., the Chalice Veil completely disappeared from the wall paintings.

The spoon was and still an essential tool in demonstrating the holy blood, though Coptic wall paintings don’t have many scenes depicting it.

We can notice its juxtaposition with the chalice. It appeared twice; once carried on a paten by an angel and the other with Melchizedek.

We can recognize no decoration on both examples, but the size and the shape were a bit different. The earliest was depicted during the 7th century A.D. in Sohag; had a bent neck while the other was depicted during the 12th century in was in El Natrun is very simple and straight.

The Vessel was represented only with angels. Both are relatively large in size and richly decorated.

They were represented during the early period (7th century A.D.) and never again mad an appearance.

The paten appeared also twice; once during the 6th century A.D. Placed on the altar while the Christ was demonstrating the holy blood himself. the second time it was represented carried by a flying angel.
### A personification of the church as a woman.
6-7th century A.D.
**Description:** A smiling woman as a symbol of the Coptic church holds a Eucharistic cup.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted Characters:</th>
<th>Used communion instrument/s:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The church as a lady</td>
<td>The sacred chalice</td>
<td>Bawit, Chapel no.17.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Graffiti, the deacon Anthony giving the Eucharist sacred chalice to Anub.
6th century A.D.
**Description:** The archdeacon Anthony is giving the Holy Eucharist to Anub while the latter is holding a piece of cloth “Chalice Veil”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted Characters:</th>
<th>Used communion instrument/s:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The deacon Anthony and Anub</td>
<td>The sacred chalice and <em>Chalice Veil</em></td>
<td>Bawit Chapel no. 36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Christ as the high priest giving the chalice of communion.
6th-8th century A.D.
**Description:** Jesus Christ himself leading the holy Eucharist and demonstrating the holy blood by himself while probably the apostles are flanking him in lesser positions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted Characters:</th>
<th>Used communion instrument/s:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ and the Apostles</td>
<td>The sacred chalice and <em>Chalice Veil</em></td>
<td>The church of Abo Serga (25 km south of modern Aswan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A flying angel holding the tools of the Eucharist.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7th century A.D.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Jesus Christ himself leading the holy Eucharist and demonstrating the holy blood by himself while probably the apostles are flanking him in lesser positions</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

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<th>Depicted Characters:</th>
<th>Used communion instrument/s:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ and the Apostles</td>
<td>The sacred Chalice, the throne of the chalice, the spoon, and the paten</td>
<td>Red Monastery, Sohag</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene of an angel holding a vessel.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6-7th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> An angel holding a decorated vessel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted Characters:</th>
<th>Used communion instrument/s:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ and the Apostles</td>
<td>A vessel</td>
<td>Red Monastery, Sohag</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The archangel Raphael holding a vessel.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6-7th century A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> The archangel is holding a vessel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted Characters:</th>
<th>Used communion instrument/s:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archangel Raphael</td>
<td>A vessel</td>
<td>Red Monastery, Sohag</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Melechizedek is giving the sacred chalice to Abraham**  
12th century A.D.  
**Description:** Melechizedek is giving the sacred chalice to Abraham who is about to drink from it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted Characters:</th>
<th>Used communion instrument/s:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abraham and Melechizedek</td>
<td>The sacred chalice</td>
<td>Deir Abu Makar, Wadi El-Natroun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Melechizedek is giving the sacred chalice to Abraham**  
12th century A.D.  
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abraham and Melechizedek</td>
<td>The sacred chalice</td>
<td>St. Antony monastery, Red Sea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**St. Stephen holding a Chalice**  
12th century A.D.  
**Description:** St. Stephen is carrying the sacred chalice and warping a Chalice Veil around his fingers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted Characters:</th>
<th>Used communion instrument/s:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Stephen</td>
<td>The sacred chalice and Chalice Veil</td>
<td>Monastery of St. Matthew the Potter, Esna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
St. Stephen holding a Chalice
12th century A.D.

**Description:** St. Stephen is carrying the sacred chalice and warping a lifafa around his fingers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depicted Characters:</th>
<th>Used communion instrument/s:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Stephen</td>
<td>The sacred chalice and <em>lifafa</em></td>
<td>Monastery of St. Matthew the Potter, Esna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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