

The development of the interior architecture of Coptic Church in the twentieth century

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Introduction:

The Coptic designer began to pay attention to the remarkable development, in both of design of the church building and also its internal architecture. But it is noted that this development in the design of the Coptic church building did not bring the rapid response or achievement required to keep pace with the amazing development witnessed by church designs in Europe and America in the interior and exterior. In this research we mention some of the most important steps and stages adopted by the Coptic Church to keep pace with this development, and we highlight two examples of Coptic Orthodox churches, one in Egypt and the other one is in the Diaspora.

The Research Problem:

•In the last three decades, there has been some notable development in the vocabulary of the Coptic style by some architects, but this development is proceeding somewhat slowly in this period in terms of interior architecture, with insufficient attention to keep pace with the global development and be open to new directions such as the direction of Postmodernism in architecture.

The Research Objective:

- Turning to some of the steps the Coptic Church has taken from the mid-twentieth century to date, in order to keep pace with the design development of church architecture and giving an example of this.
- Emphasizing that the development in the church-inspired design of the Coptic style does not contradict the spiritual and symbolic constants of the Church.
- Emphasizing the value of the Coptic style to reach the person inside this religious building for the spiritual dimension and the feeling of using the blocks and the various artistic elements without costing details and decorations.

The Research Importance:

- Record the steps taken by the Coptic Church in bringing about development at both of design of the church building and its internal architecture.

- Shedding light on some design experiences of Coptic churches, their designers sought to make designs that keep pace with the global development in designing churches, whether in the shape of the building or the determinants and elements of interior architecture.

The Research Methodology:

- Scientific method: It appears in shedding light on the architecture of the Coptic Churches in the twentieth century and its relationship to contemporary design trends and the features of development in them.

- An analytical method: It appears in the study of the elements and architectural vocabulary of two Coptic churches in Egypt and the Diaspora, distinguished by a modernist or postmodern design.

First: The Coptic Church Building Architecture:

We see that Coptic architecture has been influenced by successive civilizations in different eras. Copts have also given these Byzantine and Roman architectural schools sometimes the pharaonic religious character, which was satisfying for their psychological need by practicing rituals that affect senses, and from them they are transmitted to the soul and give rise to emotions.

And the dominant coverage has become the brick basements and domes due to the lack of wood in the remote places in which these monasteries and churches were built, the method followed in establishing these basements was the traditional local Pharaonic method that have been used over thousands of years of elliptical shape without parabolic, (Because of the lack of wood as well), and this form became unique to Coptic churches and monasteries even after they moved to Medina. For the same reason, the openings were small, knotted, and sometimes in the form of a cross, which was reflected in an indoor atmosphere with dim lighting and a humble atmosphere.

Of all the existing churches, there is no one that is exactly the same as the Byzantine churches. Coptic engineers were not initially inclined to design the church in the form of a cross, but Coptic churches were found close in shape to the Roman basilica style. The planning of the Egyptian Church was based on essence of the Basilica.

However, the dome of the Copts was and still is the preferred model for church roofs, whether it is one dome or multiple domes, and in general the Coptic engineer was interested in highlighting the dome that covers the temple in most cases, and he rarely thought of any other domes at all.

One of the advantages of designing the Coptic Church in monasteries in general is the presence of domes (usually three) over the structures and not half-domes as in the Byzantine and Syriac churches.

The use of the dome is rooted in Egyptian architecture, which have been known in its various forms throughout the ages. The dome symbolizes the embraced sky of the earth represented by the god Nut (dome of the sky) (Figure 1). Which resembles a large dome shaped like a lady with her hands and feet on the ground, and her body is in the sky covered by the sun and the stars. These domes appeared in the temples of Dandara, Abydos and Thebes, and many other temples, as mentioned above.

Regardless of the domes on top of the structures - which began to be used in the fourth century AD - the number of domes that were used after the fifth century AD varied in

covering the nave of the Coptic Churches and their sizes varied, starting with the nave covered with a single dome, covered with two equal domes or covered with six domes, nine domes, twelve domes, fifteen domes, up to twenty-five domes that are almost identical to the courtyard and around it in Deir El-Kubil west of Naqada.

The Coptic ecclesiastical building was also distinguished by its coverage of the nave in the basement system, from the use of a single cellar, and two parallel vaults to the courtyard covered with orthogonal basements. The coverage of domes and half-domes also mixed with the basements, to show the church building covered with domes and basements together. (Fig. 2-3)

Second: The development of Coptic architecture in the twentieth century:

The design of churches in the twentieth century was greatly affected by many factors, including social and economic factors, the emergence of new building materials and methods of creation, openness to Western culture, communication and information revolution, and other factors that now affect our contemporary lives. Coptic ecclesiastical architecture was also characterized by a deep spiritual character - which was distinguished by Copts from other Christians of the world - affecting the Coptic architectural approach to the shape of the building, as well as the contemplative spiritual character in directing the church building in which the Copts preceded the rest of churches around the world.

The following are some of the developments that were affected by Coptic church architecture in the second half of the twentieth century:

A- The effect of the construction method on the architectural style:

The widespread use of reinforced concrete in buildings in the twentieth century resulted in a significant development in architecture. Architects used concrete domes over structures, one with a wide sea to cover the nave and they are based on four pillars or large columns. Sometimes the cellar with a slight curvature of reinforced concrete to cover the nave to preserve the idea of the symbol that the church resembles Noah's Ark. Before the use of reinforced concrete, it was difficult to make a roof for large seas without many columns on the nave except by using high-cost wooden truss, and therefore using domes was spread in the past and also the use of many loaded columns known as the domes of the churches, that has retained some architecture ^(Paljalery) of the upper floor above the hallway side of the dish and the western wing of the winding, and is one of the characteristics of the authentic Coptic architecture.

B - Lifting the church building on stairs:

Raising the church building on multiple stairs is not considered a general rule except that the largest of the Cairo churches is located on a level higher than the street level by not less than three meters so that the entrance to the nave of the church through broad stairs that reach a wide balcony as if it is a fire escape or a high vestibule.

C- Symbolic elements in the church building:

Although traditional Coptic architecture has disappeared, many of the elements and symbols of authentic Coptic architecture are still present in modern churches. For example, modern churches are not free from the dome over the main temple and oriental apse or the bosom of the Father and the icon holder and the triumphal necklace that separates the temple group

from the nave. Making sure to raise the level of the floor of structures and the place where the clergy stands on the floor of the courtyard. Often we find the capitals of the columns in the churches that take a Coptic shape, such as the basket crown or the crown of the leaves of the acanthus as a decorative and symbolic element after it was in the past considered as a symbolic and structural decorative element at the same time, Coptic decorative patterns are often mixed with Byzantine, Roman and others. Among the most prominent examples of mixing styles are the Church of St. Mark on Cleopatra Street in Heliopolis and the Angel Church at Sheraton Residence in Cairo.

D- Modern technologies:

Modern technologies have recently spread widely on a large number of Coptic churches, such as air conditioning systems, acoustics, transmission networks, photography and direct broadcasting, as well as at the level of interior design, modern lighting systems have entered with their various and multiple technologies, how to control them and the intensity of lighting and Variation in shades along with longer life span and lower energy consumption such as the use of LED bulbs and lighting applications to illuminate the various parts of the church and highlight the beauty of its architectural blocks and also illuminate icons and cabins in a thoughtful manner.

The use of modern technologies and CNC machines also extended to designs of wood decorations in ornaments, cornices, claddings, icon holders, sickles, booths, doors, windows and furniture pieces that have become more advanced using modern machines such as electric router, carving machines, drilling, polishing and unloading. As well as the development in the work of decorations and gypsum inscriptions from the work of various molds and the subsequent gypsum works in the use of new materials such as material of GRC and fiberglass in the work of sculptures, prominent decorations, ornaments and cornices inside and outside the Coptic Church building.

The researcher believes that with the spread of these modern technologies, some negatives have resulted, and some feelings of repetition may have crept into the interior design of many churches. There is no doubt that this repetition of treatments and decorative units, especially in woodwork - most notably the iconic bearer - created an atmosphere of similarity in the internal architecture of Coptic churches significantly and especially that the Coptic churches rely heavily on their design on woodwork and traditions. If the monotony of the woodwork is fixed, it negatively affects the general design of the church.

It has become rare to find a Coptic church with a unique design - creating a distinct personality for it that hangs in the mind of the visitor and is always associated with this church and this place without being shared by these features elsewhere - except in the least few examples.

Third: The Coptic Church Building and Postmodern Architecture:

The influence of postmodern architecture in the Coptic Church began in the second half of the twentieth century by some architects, which is consistent with the intellect of the Coptic Orthodox Church in adhering to the originality, spirituality, and authentic form of the ecclesiastical building, away from the exaggerations of the architecture of modernity in simplification and extreme abbreviation. The interest in the function is only for the church building as a place for meeting people without paying attention to the hidden spiritual and

symbolic dimensions that the church receives and even lives while inside the Coptic church building.

By the middle of the twentieth century, the postmodern architectural development of the church building began to appear through many church buildings that were originally constructed in its data, reference, contemporary, and sophisticated design and architectural treatments for it, and this development has emerged greatly and noticeably in the external architectural design of the church building, much more than its application in the design of the internal architecture of the church, which have been developed in terms of techniques and modern technology in many cases, and that is what the church design faces in the traditional churches - especially the Coptic Orthodox Church - from fear of renewal and development in the interior design of the building Alkensy-, as happened in the evolution of its form Aforeigy- which tends to make monotony and great similarity among different Coptic churches.

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