

TWO COPTIC TEXTILE OBJECTS AT THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM NEW PUBLISHING"TEXTILE

TWO COPTIC TEXTILE OBJECTS AT THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM TEXTILE "NEW PUBLISHING"

قطعتا نسيج قبطي بالمتحف القومي للحضارة المصرية (نشر جديد)

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ABSTRACT:

This article endeavors to examine two Coptic textile artifacts that are currently preserved at the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo (NMEC). The purpose of this study is to provide a novel publication on these artifacts. Both pieces have been meticulously examined, utilizing both magnifying lenses and microscopes. Wool and linen are the primary materials that were utilized in the weaving process of these two pieces, which were woven using distinct practical techniques. Notably, both pieces are adorned with intricate woven ornamentations, including a scene that depicts the life of King David.

KEYWORDS:

Coptic textiles, Tunic, natural fibers, tapestry, The Life of David, Childish of Coptic Art

المخلص :

يهدف البحث إلى دراسة وفحص قطعتين من النسيج القبطي ، محفوظتان حاليًا بالمتحف القومي للحضارة المصرية في القاهرة (NMEC) ، كما أن الغرض من هذا البحث هو إتاحة نتائج جديدة عن هذه القطع الأثرية ، عبر فحص القطعتين بدقة باستخدام العدسات المكبرة والأجهزة المجهرية ، وتبين أن الصوف والكتان هما المادتان الأساسيتان اللتان تم استخدامهما في عملية نسج هاتين القطعتين ، حيث تم نسجهما باستخدام تقنيات عملية متميزة ، إضافة إلى أن كلا القطعتين مزينتين بزخارف منسوجة معقدة ، بما في ذلك المشهد الذي يصور حياة الملك داود .

الكلمات الدالة :

النسيج القبطي ، سترة ، ألياف طبيعية ، القباطي ، حياة داوود ، طفولية الفن القبطي

1 - INTRODUCTION

The National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo (NMEC) boasts a vast collection of Christian textiles, which dates back from the 4th century to the 19th century. This remarkable collection has been sourced from various locations, including the repositories of several Egyptian museums, such as the Museum of Islamic Art, the Coptic Museum, the Egyptian Museum, the Egyptian Textile Museum in Cairo and the Gayer Anderson Museum, as well as from multiple archeological sites, including the excavations of Deir Al-Banat, Al-bajawat, the Ain Al-Seera, Al-Fustat, Al-Imam Al-Shafi'I, Fayoum, and a private collection of Dr. Najlaa Raiyadh.¹

The Coptic textile fragments under investigation were discovered at Deir el-Medina² (see Pl. 1), that preserved at stores of NMEC.

The paper aims to answer several questions, which help provide a documentary study and publication of the results under study. The most important questions are "What were the fabric components in these objects? What weaving methods were used? What were the contents, artistic features, and functional uses of the texture? What is the dating of manufacturing study pieces?"



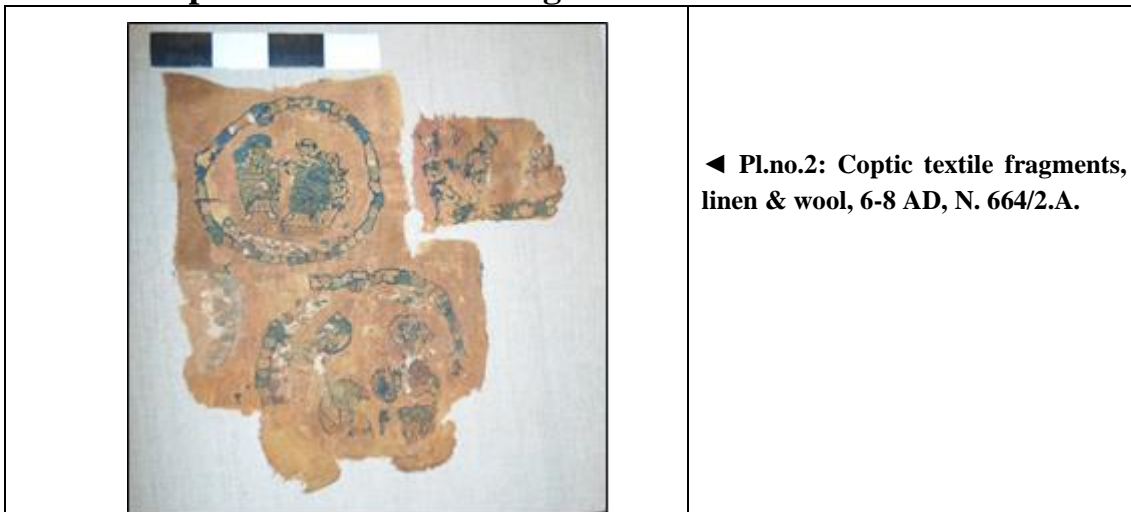
Pl.no.1: The village of Deir el-Medina in Luxor.

¹ - El Nemr & Abd Elwahab, *Five Coptic Textile Objects at The National Museum of Egyptian Civilization 'New Publishing'*, p17.

² - located in Qurna, Luxor. This ancient workmen's village is situated in a small valley north of Wadi Al-Melouk on the Tebaa west bank. Deir el-Medina was established during, or prior to, the reign of Tuhotmos I (1504 - 1492 BC) and thrived until the end of the 20th Dynasty (ca. 1070 BC). This village was home to the workmen who were responsible for constructing the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings. It is believed that a temple was later converted into a church, which is evident in the writings and drawings of the Coptic people.

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2 - Description of two textile fragments



2 – 1 - The first object

Functional use	Part of a Coptic textile.
Source (s)	Deir el-Medina, Qurna, Luxor.
Registration Number	664/2.A
Shape	Rectangular
Measure	39 cm × 28 cm
Fibres	linen and wool
Weave structure	Plain Weave, weft-face (Tapestry)
Warp density	10/1 cm
Weft density	18/1 cm
Yarn twist direction	The right direction to the left (S).
Dating	From the Sixth to the Eighth century AD.
Description	This textile fragment features two circular medallions, one of which depicts a scene where a person seated in a chair is being approached by another person standing in front of them, with both figures appearing in profile. Unfortunately, due to damage to the drawing, the details are unclear. This medallion is surrounded by a circular frame decorated with geometric details formed by

	<p>connected rings. The other circular medallion contains animal decorations, but the details are also unclear (see Pl. 2). The colors used in the decoration are yellow, green, red, black, dark blue and yellow floor.</p> <p>The object is in poor condition, with fibers that are completely brittle and a significant loss of threading and threading in the outer edges. The colors have also faded, both partially and totally.</p>
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	<p>◀Pl.no.3: A Coptic textile fragments, linen and wool 6-8 AD, N. 664/2.B.</p>
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1) – 2 - Second piece

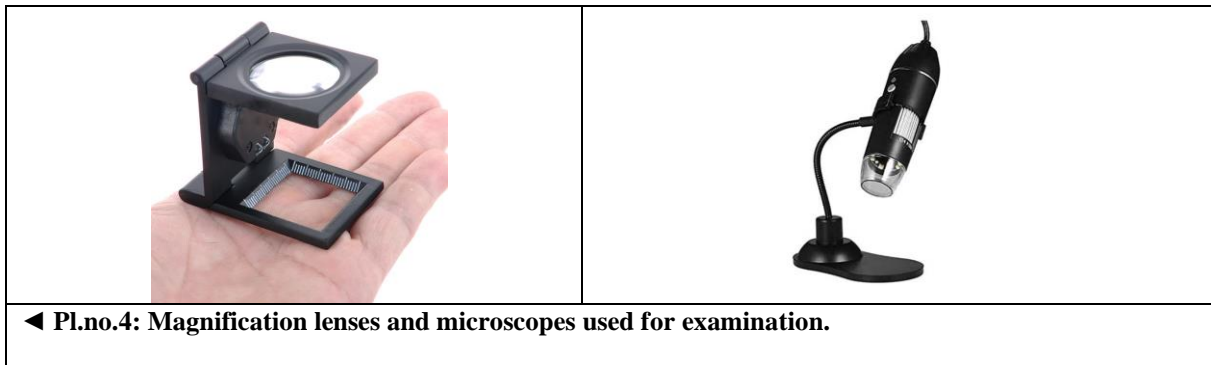
Functional use	Part of a Coptic textile
Source (s)	Deir el-Medina, Qurna, Luxor.
Registration Number	664/2.B
Shape	Rectangular
Measure	33 cm × 23 cm
Fibres	Linen and wool.
Weave structure	Plain Weave, weft-face (tapestry).
Warp density	10/1 cm
Weft density	18/1 cm
Yarn twist	The right direction to the left (S).

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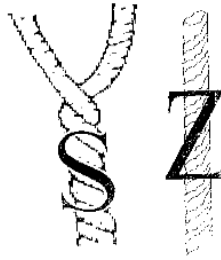
direction	
Dating	From the sixth to the eighth century AD.
Description	<p>The decoration of the fragment consists of a circular weaving with an interior drawing depicting a person seated on a throne and covered by a gable roof. The person is described as having a rectangular face, round eyes, a large nose, and their head is surrounded by a holy circle. The front of the drawing contains unclear decoration due to damage. The decoration is surrounded by an around circular frame that includes geometric details formed from connected rings (see Pl. no. 3).</p> <p>The colors used in the decoration are Yellow, green, dark and light blue, brown, red, orange, black, rose and yellow floor.</p> <p>The condition of the textile shows severe deterioration, including worn and eroded areas with stains and dirt, as well as partial and total loss of the threads and weaving in the outer parts or edges. Additionally, the colors have become pale over time.</p>

2) - Analysis of production techniques

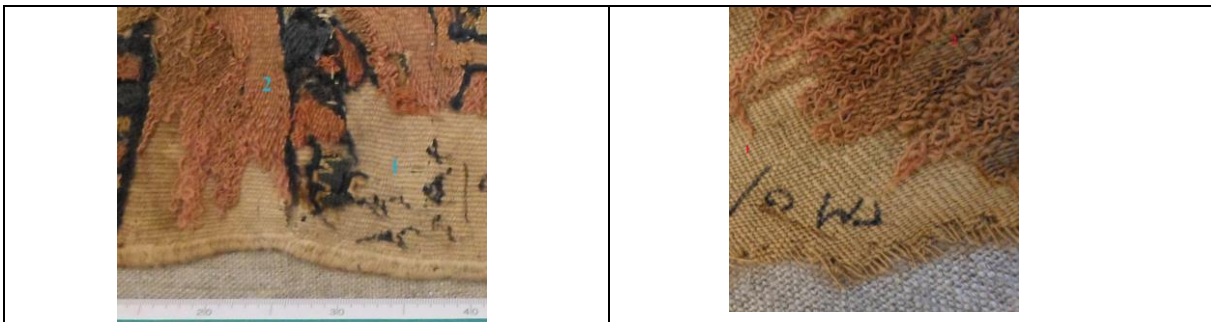
The examination of the two pieces-by Magnifying lenses and Microscopes see Pl.no.4- reveals that each piece consists of two fixed parts. The first piece is made of linen weft and warp fibres, while the second is made of colored wool weft and warp fibres used for decoration. The analysis further demonstrates that the warp fibres are 10/1 cm², and the weft fibers are 18/1 cm², twisted right to left, which is typical for most Egyptian textiles(see Pl.no.5.6).



◀ Pl.no.5: Twist threads in Egyptian textiles, Marouf. M., *Identification and Characterization Fibers and Weave Structures*.p.15

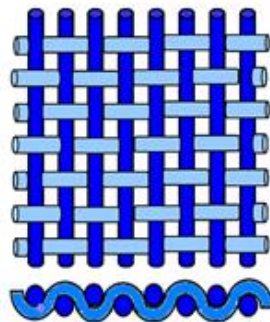


Various thicknesses of fibres were used in these pieces, resulting in a complete veiling of the warp fibres with only a slight projection remaining on the surface. Moreover, the weft fibres became thicker, resulting in a firmer texture in the decorated parts.



◀Pl.no.6: Pieces studied consists of two fixed parts.

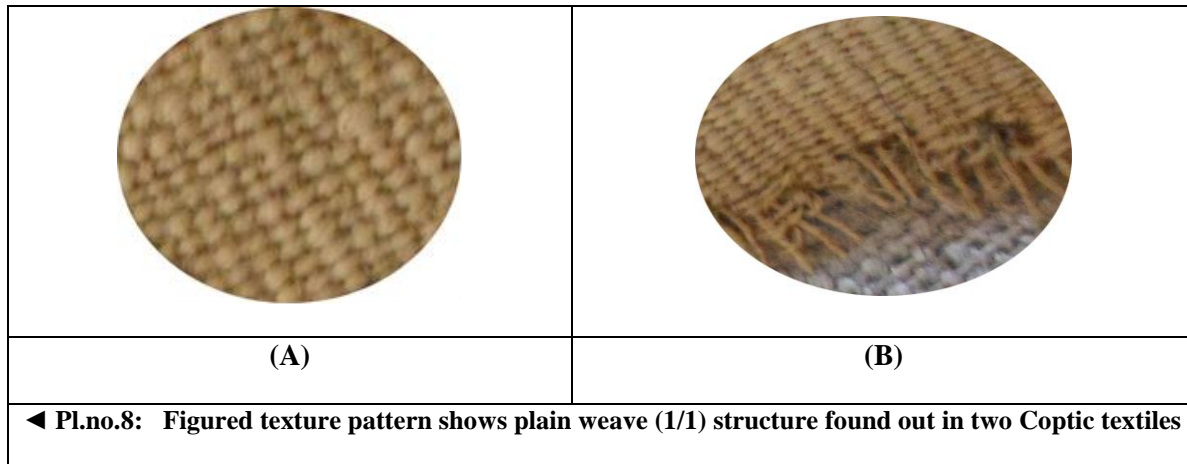
The weaver utilized the plain weaving method (1/1) to create the ground of the pieces under study. This is a well-known method of weaving where both the warp and weft fibres are regularly intersected at a 90-degree angle (see Pl.no.7.8), resulting in the warp fibers disappearing, and another layer appearing. This pattern is then reversed in the next layer of warp fibers, and so on.¹



◀ Pl.no.7: The plain weave structure (1/1) the simplest of all weaves in archaeological textiles

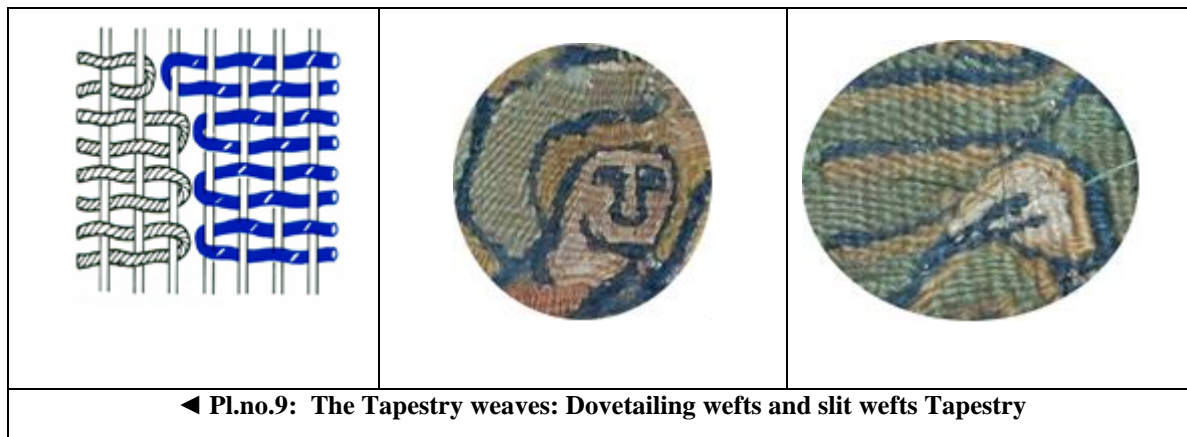
¹-Barber, *Prehistoric Textile*, p.149, Hooper, *The Technique of Greek and Roman Weaving*, p. 281, Mahadevan, *Dictionary of Textile*, p.140.

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The weavers executed the decoration using a non-extended technique that goes by various names such as Tapestry,¹ woven decoration, or painted textiles. Another name for it is weft-face textiles, but the most accurate definition for this technique is non-extended weft textiles.² This term more aptly describes the texture and composition of this technique as opposed to Tapestry, which refers to the broader concept of Egyptian textiles and not a specific technique.³

Decorative elements are achieved by utilizing colored wefts that are woven in a non-extended manner along the woven piece. To begin, a weaver inserts the colored weft fiber into the decorated area, among the warp fibers, through an opening created by pulling/harnessing half of the loom. This process involves separating single fibers from twofold ones. The weaver then passes the second weft fiber through the same area or in accordance with the decoration, and so on, until the decoration is completed⁴ ((see Pl.no.9).



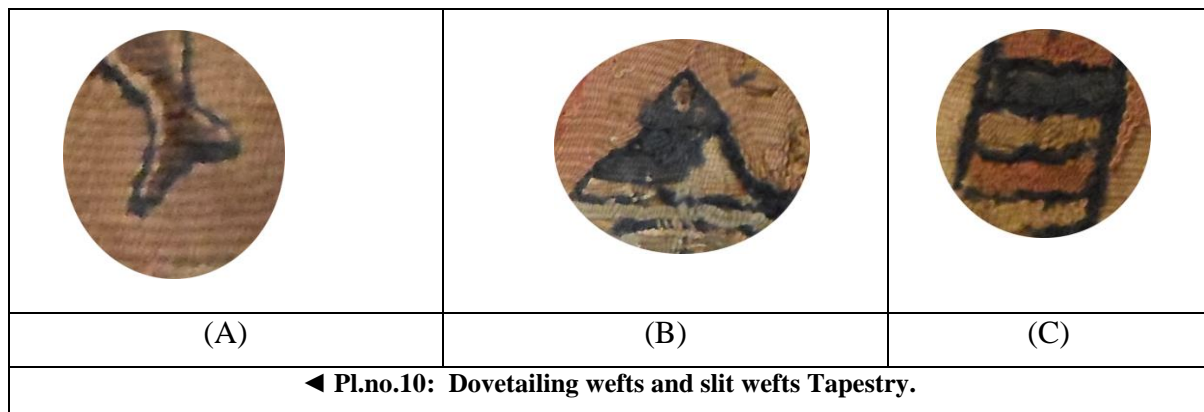
The subject of this study exhibits several characteristics of Egyptian textiles. The weaver used fibers of varying thickness to create a complete veiling of warp fibers, resulting in a surface with only slight projections. In addition, the textiles became firmer and more decorated (see Pl no.9.10).

¹- Maher, *Mansougāt al-Muthaf al-Qebty*, p 15.

²- Collingwood, *The Techniques of Rug Weaving*, p. 55.

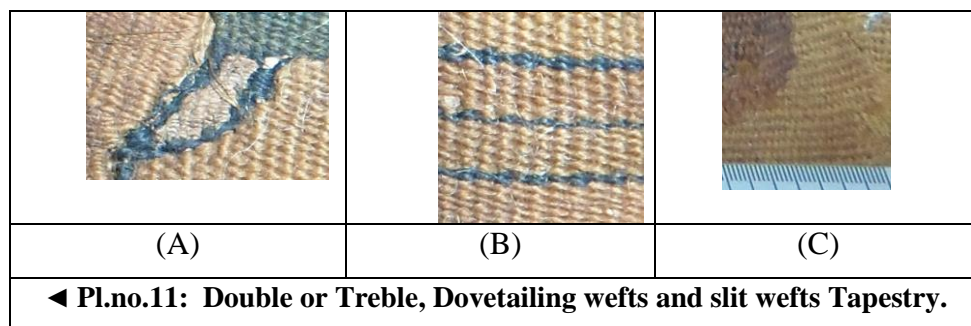
³- Marouf, *al-Tahlil al-Teqqany lelmansougat thāt al-lohmā ghair al-momtdah*, p. 2.

⁴- Kamel, *Madkhal ela Technologia al-Naseeg w al-Tapestrey*, p.108.



Wool fibres were used for their flexibility and elasticity,¹ which caused the fibers to soak in more effectively. Linen fibres were used to create the ground structure as both wrap and weft, resulting in a more coherent textile. Various interlocking techniques were applied in the warp and weft to avoid interface cracks caused by weft reversion (see Plate no.10.11). These techniques included:

- Dovetailing method of wefts and wrap fibers with a parallel motion. In this case, the area of the color zone extends within the neighboring color zone. At the same time, the area adjacent to the first zone extends to the first area, and thus, alternates. In this method, one or two weft fibers are placed between the two areas.²
 - Double or Treble Dovetailing Method in which the weaver uses two or three colored wefts into two neighboring areas on a mutual fibre³ (see Pl.no.9.10).
 - The weaver used the intersection of weft with wrap fibers at an acute angle to weave most decorative units, such as faces and cup decorations (see Pl.no.10.11)
- These techniques allowed the two pieces to be woven into one texture and one piece.



3) - Analysis of Decorations


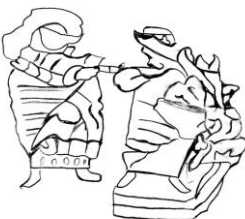
¹ -Nicies, *Clothing Fibers*, p.16.

²-Marouf, *al-Tahlil al-Teqqany lel-Mansougat thāt al-lohmā ghair al-Momtadah*, p.6.

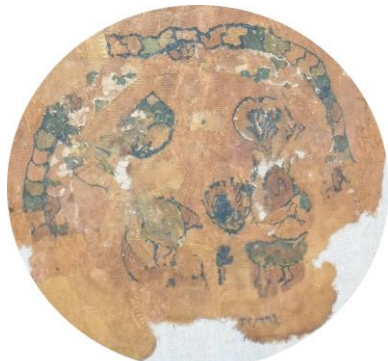

³- Madani, *al-Kelim al-Quoqazy w al-Anaqoly*, p.101.

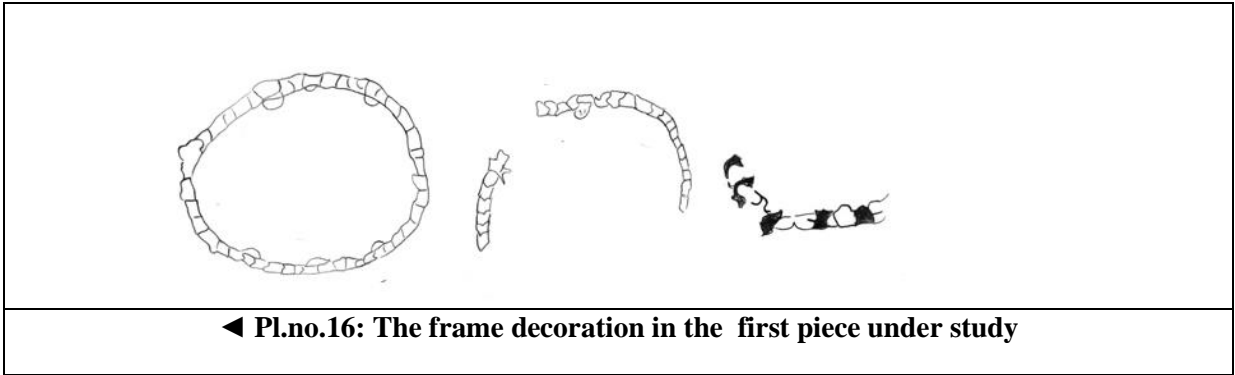
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The decorations on the two investigated pieces vary from pictorial scenes that consist of decorative items, such as human, animal, and geometrical decorations. The first piece (see Pl. 2.12) is decorated with animal and geometrical decorations within two circular medallions(see. Although the decorations appear to be crushed, there is a pictorial scene of a man sitting on a chair facing another one (see Pl.no.13).

	
<p>◀ Pl.no.12: The first piece Decorations in Coptic textile, fragments, NMEC, N. 664/2.A.</p>	<p>◀ Pl.no.13: Human motifs in Coptic textile, fragments, NMEC, N. 664/2.A.</p>

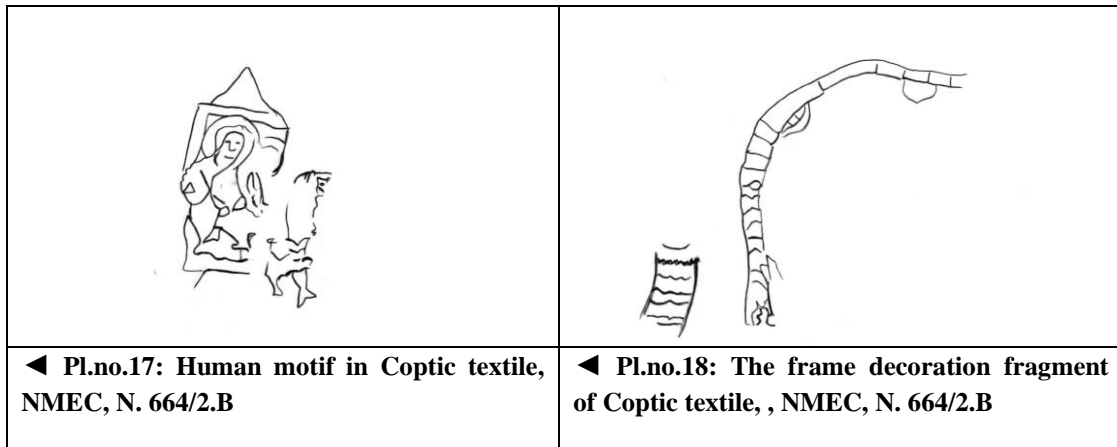
The decorations are simple in a sense that they comprise rectangular faces and rectangular bodies, wearing simple clothes and decorated with parallel and intersecting ribbons. Furthermore, the whole scene is encompassed by a circular border that consists of two ribbons; the first possibly consisted of plant decorations, and the other comprises geometrical motifs (see Pls. nos. 12.13.14.15.16).

	
<p>◀ Pl.no.14: Animal, plant and geometrical motifs in Coptic textile, fragment, NMEC, N. 664/2.A.</p>	<p>◀ Pl.no.15: Animal decoration motif in Coptic textile, fragment, NMEC, N. 664/2.A.</p>



The second sets of decorations contain the remnants of paintings depicting legs and parts of a horse's body. Due to its state of deterioration, it is difficult to discern its details, although it is believed to depict two horsemen riding their horses (see Pl.no.14,15).

The second piece (see Pl.no.3) depicts a human seated on a chair or throne beneath a gabled ceiling. The subject has a round face, which is slightly rectangular in shape, and large eyes. His head is surrounded by a large halo, and he wears simple clothing, perhaps consisting of a tunic and decorated cloak (see Pl.no.17.18).



The observer of Coptic art may notice its apparent simplicity, which could be mistaken for the drawings of children due to the unassuming nature of its decoration. This simple style is perhaps the most prominent characteristic of Coptic art, marking it as a unique and authentic form of Egyptian art. Furthermore, the childlike quality that characterizes Coptic art is specific to the local Egyptian variant of this art form.¹

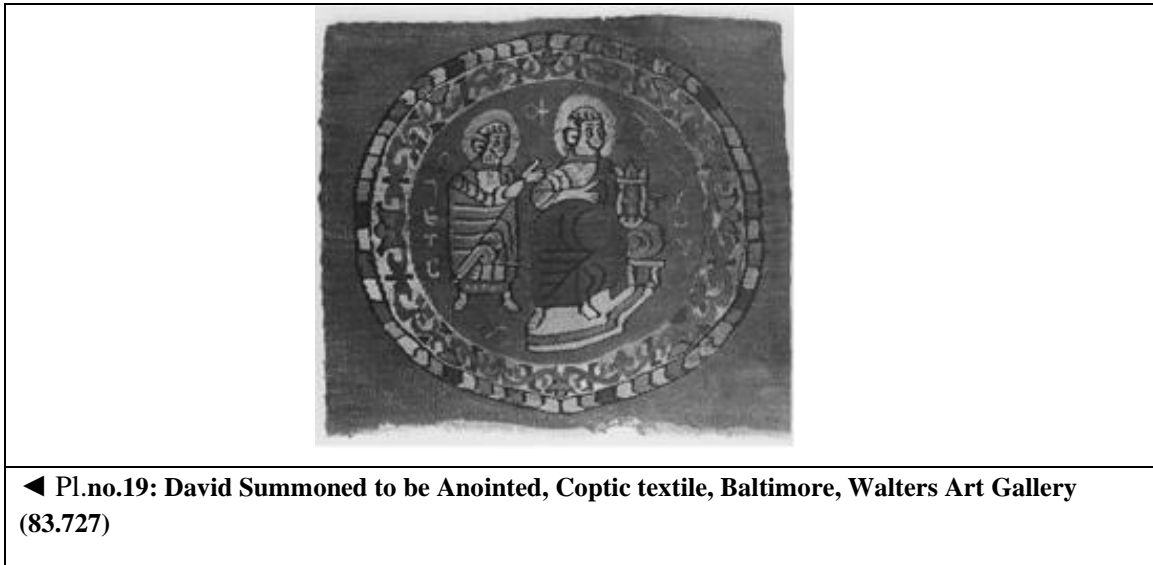
¹ -The religious factor and the historical factor are the most important factors were the most influenced in the childishness of Coptic art. The reader of this Christian history and Religion notes that Egypt was the refuge and fortress of Christ and the Virgin Mary when they fled from Palestine to Egypt. At that time, Jesus was an infant child, with all that the word child means of innocence, simplicity, and nature free from the evils and troubles of life, In addition to what they surrounded him by a fence of security, love and protection, and they embraced him and his

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4) - Comparative study

The pictorial scenes on the two studied pieces were represented in many Coptic works, especially textiles, such as the collection of Coptic textiles preserved in the Museum of Coptic Art in Cairo, The Walters Art Gallery, and the British Museum.

The collection of The Walters Art Gallery No. 83-727), a kind of similarity appears. The piece in The Walters Art Gallery is decorated with a circle containing a religious scene representing a part of David's (PBUH) life. In this scene, David is invited to be anointed by Samuel the prophet. It shows faces that tend to be rectangular, with large round eyes and rectangular bodies that wear multi-layered clothes in the form of parallel and intersecting ribbons and lines. As a conclusion, both pieces represent one aspect of David's life (see Pl.19).



This decoration also bears resemblance to a piece of linen and wool textile from Akhmem that is currently housed in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. This piece represents a scene in which Samuel the prophet holds an object and faces David. The figures are depicted with rectangular faces and almond-shaped eyes, with a prominent nose, and surrounded by a large halo. Additionally, they are shown wearing voluminous clothing, possibly a tunic and cloak (see Pl.no.20).

mother at the land of Egypt, so that this infant child has become as their souls and robbed their minds and acquired them, in a way that made them automatically attracted to love each infant baby as the infant Jesus, which explains to us That is one of the local characteristics of Coptic art, This is also explained by the small size of many Coptic products as well as their decorative elements on the childhood of this art. The Coptic artist was influenced by the small size of the little child, Jesus Christ, as reflected in their small arts, which has also influenced the Coptic architecture also, through the small size of architectural units in churches and monasteries. Look: Mamdouh Elsayed: *Derasa Semyaeia Le-Thalathat Tasaweer min Makhtout Kalila wa Demna (Roaia Fanyia Semiologia Moqarana)* , *Magalet Al-Emaraa wa Al-Fenon wa Al-Elom Al-Ensania, Al-Adad 13, January 2019*, p. 475.



◀ Pl.no.20: David Summoned to be Anointed, Coptic textile, Akhmem, The Coptic Museum in Cairo.

The collection of The Walters Art Gallery includes a decorated textile piece that bears a striking resemblance to the decoration of the piece under study. The rectangular piece features a scene from David's life, specifically his visit to King Saul, in which the king sits on his throne facing David. The faces are round with large eyes and broad noses, and the heads are surrounded by large halos.¹

Additionally, The British Museum houses a Fragment of tapestry with a red background depicting two scenes of the Life of David; two medallions framed by one frieze of geometric motifs and one frieze of vegetal and flower motifs; The medallion on the left is David presented to Saul, and above the figures are small motifs in undyed linen that were probably an inscription (in Coptic?) naming the figures?; The medallion on the right is David playing the lyre, with another unidentified human figure; between the medallions are two similar motifs - possilbe basket full of flowers in the middle with vegetal and flowers on either sid(see Pl.no.21.22).



◀ Pl.no.21: Fragment of tapestry, linen and wool, 7thC-8thC, Egypt: Sohag (Governorate): Akhmim, the British Museum,N. EA65662.

¹ -Thomas, *The Life of David*, p. 25.

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◀ Pl.no.22: The medallion on the left is David presented to Saul, Fragment of tapestry, the British Museum,N. EA65662

Both Samuel and David are depicted with rectangular faces, almond-shaped eyes, straight noses, and heads surrounded by large Halos. Moreover, they wear wide clothing, such as a Tunic and a cloak. The second circle displays a portrait of David's visit to King Saul, where Saul is depicted sitting on his throne that ends with a pyramidal crown. The king has an irregular round face, small eyes, and a straight nose. Meanwhile, David is standing in front of the king with Samuel at his back, dating of this piece back to the 7th to 8th centuries(see Pl.no.21).

Also, the collection of The Morgan Library & Museum kept manuscript of the Winchester Bible, frontispiece for 1 Samuel with scenes from the Life of David, dating back to c. 1150–80(see Pl.no.23).



◀ Pl.no.23: Winchester Bible, frontispiece for 1 Samuel with scenes from the Life of David, dating back to c. 1150–80, The Morgan Library & Museum.

Notice that David is represented clothed but without armor, conforming to the biblical account, but not, as in Later Renaissance representations, naked. In the second register, David is represented on the left, playing the harp in front of King Achish, who in a fit of jealousy throws a spear at him. In the pendant image on the right, David is anointed Achish's successor by the priest Samuel, after Achish commits suicide(see Pl.no.24).



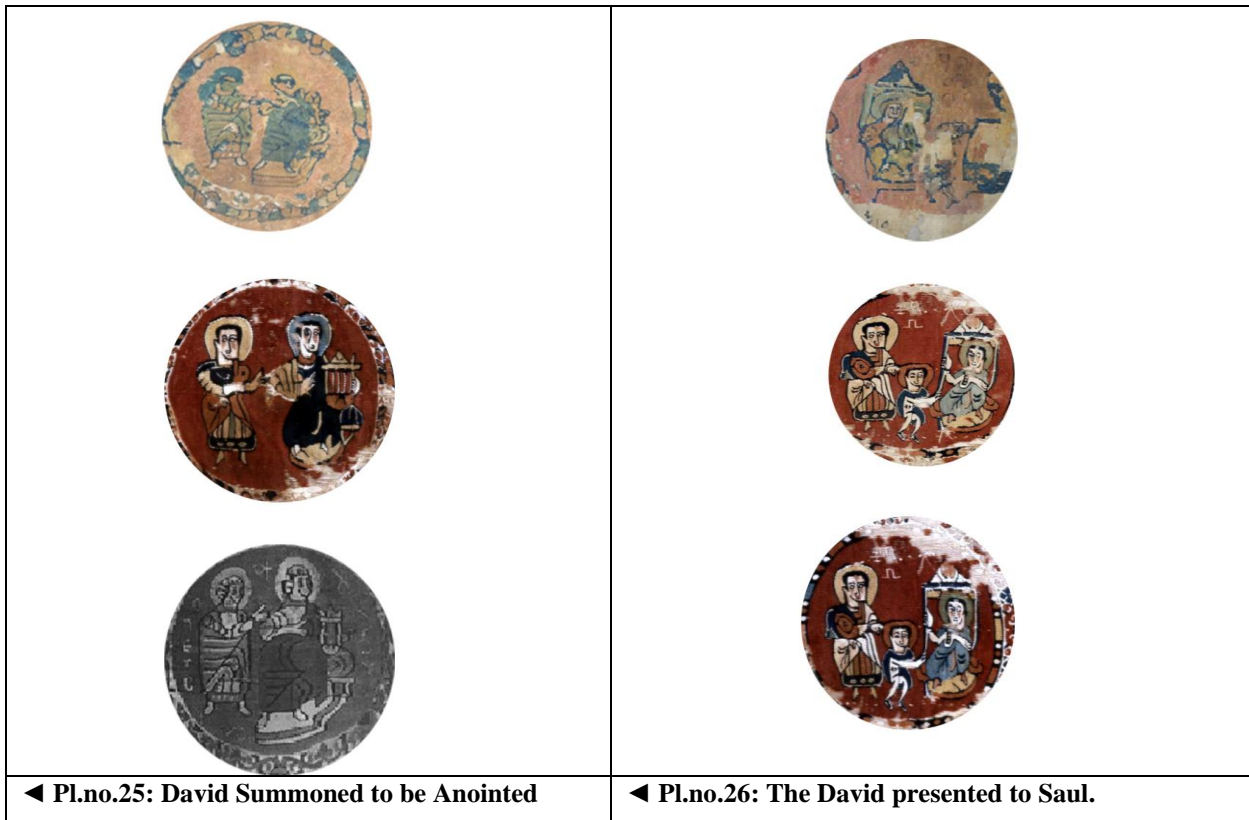
◀ Pl.no.24: scenes from the Life of David, The Morgan Library & Museum.

In the bottom register on the left, Absalom, the son of David, is put to death, and in the final scene, to the right, David is informed of the death of his son and weeps in grief(see Pl.no.24).

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6 - Common characteristics among both objects

Both objects exhibit similar characteristics. The weaver designed simple decorations to express human characteristics through facial features such as rectangular faces, large eyes, big noses, and small closed mouths. The bodies in both pieces are depicted as long (Pls.nos 12.13.14.15.17.18),¹ and the clothes are simple, perhaps consisting of long tunics and cloaks. The heads are surrounded by great halos (see Pls.no. 2.13), which add to the sense of splendor. The weaver focused on portraying the main features of the body, with the figures depicted as sitting on furniture such as chairs and thrones. Geometrical shapes such as ribbons, circles, squares, rectangles, and rounds decorate clothes, furniture, and borders. The plant decorations are simple, with a circular border consisting of two ribbons and wavy branches with simple leaves (see Pls.no19.20.21.22.23.24.25.26).



In conclusion, these decorations represent a part of David's life (PBUH) as quoted in the Holy Bible. It is mentioned in the 16th and 17th chapters of Samuel's Book. The weaver successfully portrayed the story of Prophet Samuel sitting on a chair and standing in front of the Prophet David. The weaver also portrayed King Saul sitting on a throne and standing in front of the Prophet David, influenced by verses such as "And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he" (1Sa 16:12). The weaver depicted the faces of the Prophet Samuel and

¹- Gruneisen, *Les Caractéristique de l'art copte*, p.225.

David, as well as King Saul, with round faces, round eyes, broad noses, and rectangular bodies, highlighting their good looks.

7 - Chronology

Upon comparing the two objects under investigation to Coptic textiles housed in national and international museums dating from the 6th to the 8th centuries, particularly those related to the life of David, it can be observed that they share many common characteristics, such as rectangular faces with round eyes, prominent noses, and small, closed mouths. Furthermore, the decorations are predominantly simple in design, lacking the elaborate Romanian and Byzantine decorations of later periods, which strongly suggests a dating to the 6th and 8th centuries.

8 - CONCLUSION

Overall, this study sheds light on the unique characteristics of Coptic textiles from the 6th to the 8th century, and the religious and historical influences that shaped them. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the cultural heritage of Egypt and the development of textile art in the region.

The present study has yielded several important results;

- 1) Firstly, it focused on two unique pieces That had never been published before.
- 2) The examination of these pieces proved that the weaver used natural fibres. The wrap and weft were made from colored linen and wool fibers of different thicknesses, resulting in a complete veiling of the wrap fibers and a firmer texture in the decorated parts.
- 3) The decorations on the pieces were made using the old method of weft-face textiles, which is commonly found in Egyptian textiles.
- 4) The results showed that all threads were twisted in a right-to-left direction (S)
- 5) The two pieces can be considered as one texture and one piece.
- 6) Comparing the two pieces under study with other textiles from in the Museum of Coptic Art in Cairo, The Walters Art Gallery, and the British Museum that have better decorations showed that the pieces display a religious scene related to an aspect of David's life mentioned in the Holy Bible.
- 7) The pictorial scenes on the two studied pieces were a kind of similarity appears with scenes representing 1 Samuel with scenes from the Life of David in Winchester Bible
- 8) The study also attributed the pieces to the period from the 6th to the 8th century, based on comparisons with Coptic textiles in national and international museums.

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