

COPTIC CANOPIAN DOMES IN ARCHITECTURE AND ART IN EGYPT

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Abstract

The Coptic Canopian domes consider Egyptian invention, trace far to all civilizations, and show in medieval ages with major development [1]. The Coptic architect executed this architectural element to accentuate element at the bottom of the dome. It refers to the importance of this place and gives it a kind of sanctity and reverence.

So the architect carried out the element of the Coptic Canopian dome on the altar and baptistery and the chair of the Bishop and the Ambon only. Inside the dome the artist depicted the heavenly scene to confirm the concept and purpose of making a dome over the altar or baptistery. The architect and artist wanted to feel the priest who stands in heaven, the angels hear his prayers. So the Coptic Canopian element symbolizes the sky.

Keywords: Canopian, domes, altar, Coptic

1. Introduction

Across the ages the dome was known in Egypt in its different locations. At first the ancient Egyptian legend indicated that the goddess Nut (the dome of heaven, goddess of heaven) spoke about the creation of the universe and how life began in it. This goddess was linked to a lady with two legs and two hands supported on the earth, which resemble the supports of the dome, while her body was in the sky as a covered form with the sun and stars [2].

This idea remained firmly rooted in the mind of the ancient Egyptian and transferred to the Coptic, which is spiritual by nature. So he uses the dome to cover all the elements of the church.

The dome covers the nave, where the faithful feel that they exist in heaven while the dome that surmounts the sanctuary transfers our mind to heaven where Christ's throne is.

The roof of the baptistery carries the baptized one to the heavenly life. And that covers the Ambon (pulpit) which teaches us to venerate the heavenly canons.

We also find the dome above the choir where the elder and the deacons chant their heavenly hymns. Also over the throne of the bishop where he resembles our lord, remembering us with his heavenly throne.

2. Historical background

A canopy is an overhead roof or else a structure over which a fabric or metal, or wood covering is attached, able to provide shade or shelter. A canopy can also be a tent, generally without a floor. The word comes from the Ancient Greek κωνώπειον (konópeion, "cover to keep insects off"), from κώνωψ (kónops, "cone-face"), which is a bahuvrihi compound meaning "mosquito". The first 'o' changing into 'a' may be due to influence from the place name Canopus, Egypt thought of as a place of luxuries[3].

Canopy has become in Italian A baldachin, or baldaquin (from Italian: baldacchino), is a canopy of state typically placed over an altar or throne. It had its beginnings as a cloth canopy[4].

"Baldachin" was originally a luxurious type of cloth from Baghdad, from which name the word is derived, in English as "baudekin" and other spelling. Matthew Paris records that Henry III of England wore a robe "de preciosissimobaldekin" at a ceremony at Westminster Abbey in 1247 [5]. The word for the cloth became the word for the ceremonial canopies made from the cloth.

In the Middle Ages, a hieratic canopy of state (or "estate"), cloth of honour, or cloth of state was hung above the seat of a personage of sufficient standing, as a symbol of authority.

The seat under such a canopy of state would normally be raised on a dais. The cloth above a seat generally continued vertically down to the ground behind the seat. Emperors and kings, reigning dukes and bishops were accorded this honour.

The Virgin Mary in particular, is very often shown sitting under a cloth of honour in medieval and Renaissance paintings where she is shown enthroned with saints.

The canopy imitated cloth in bronze, as did many subsequent imitations. This famous and spectacular feature is generally called the "Baldacchino", though strictly it is a ciborium.

Bernini's design for the Baldachin incorporated giant solomonic columns inspired by columns that ringed the altar of the Old St. Peter's.

These columns were originally donated by Constantine, and a tradition asserts they are the columns from the Temple of Jerusalem. The lowest parts of the four columns of Bernini's Baldachin have a helical groove, and the middle and upper sections of the columns are covered in olive and bay branches, which are populated with a myriad of bees and small putti.

Pope Urban VIII's family coat of arms, those of the Barberini family, with their signature bees, are at the base of every column.

A baldachin may also be used in formal processions, including Royal entries, coronation or funeral processions, to signify the elite status of the individual it covers.

Such canopies might be made of anything from muslin to heavy brocade, or even constructed of less flexible materials, and are supported by poles, whether affixed to a carriage, or carried by people walking on each side. An Egyptian Pharaoh, for example, was escorted both in life and in death by such a canopy of estate.

As we see Luke and Mark the Evangelists among them we see a Canopian coptic dome. Hanging from its sides curtains in a miniature from the saviors (Spassky) Gospels, Yaroslavl. It is back to 1220 (Figure 1).



Figure 1. A miniature from the saviors (Spassky) Gospels, Yaroslavl.

3. The Coptic Canopian domes

The Coptic Canopian domes appeared in architecture and Coptic art. A group of domes, called. This name is derived from the ancient Egyptian language. In ancient Egyptian civilization there was a model of the term Canopian domes.

This term was then transferred to other civilizations. Such as Greek, Roman, Babylonian, Assyrian, Coptic, and Islamic. During the medieval Ages in Europe evolved greatly. The kings and princes of Europe added to the Canopic style an extravagant artistic and decorative richness.

Canopic is expression or idiom called on the dome which established above something, which built on four pillars or columns and was not surrounded by walls. There is no door or window. It is open from four sides to the hall or the courtyard which built in it.

but in other cases it is a sturdy, permanent architectural feature, particularly over high altars in cathedrals, where such a structure is more correctly called a ciborium when it is sufficiently architectural in form.

A cloth of honour is a simpler cloth hanging vertically behind the throne, usually continuing to form a canopy. It can also be used for similar canopies in interior design, for example above beds, and for processional canopies used in formal state ceremonies such as coronations, held up by four or more men with poles attached to the corners of the cloth.

This type of domes was built on various architectural elements, such as baptisteries, altars, basins, fountains, a bishop's chair. But the most common elements are the altars and baptisteries. The architect

wanted and intended to accentuate the architectural element at the bottom of the dome. It refers to the importance of this place and gives it a kind of sanctity and reverence [6].

The Canopian domes are built of bricks, clay bricks, wood and marble. In the middle Ages, the Canopian domes also made from luxurious and varied textile in its colors and shapes. The domes made of textile were placed above the pops' chairs or the kings' chairs.

Some of the Canopian domes had three or four staircases, through this staircases ascend to the altar, baptism, or the chair of the pope or the king. This confirms the idea that the architect intended to highlight the importance of the architectural element. He did not make the architectural element at ground level.

In Coptic architecture, the Canopian domes found above the altars and baptisms, especially the baptisms that were built outside the church in the midst of the monastic communities.

The architect used marble and wood to build the Canopian domes in the Coptic churches. A lot of marble domes found in rich churches. Such as the Abu Mina church in Marriott, "the marble city", and most churches in the "lower Egypt". While wooden domes found in poor churches. Such as most Upper Egypt churches "Alsaeid"

The Coptic artist created the decoration and the draw on these domes. He draw sights from bible and Coptic saints or martyrs inside the dome. The artist's drawings inspire the priest during prayer and feel spiritual. The priest imagines that he stands in heaven among the saints and the martyrs. The Canopian dome symbolizes to the sky in architecture and Coptic art.

One of the most beautiful examples is a Canopian dome made of wood. It is above the altar of the Church of the Virgin Mary in the village of Shamia - in the coast of Salim - Assiut Governorate. The dome is adorned with draws of saints and martyrs. It painted according to Coptic art (Figure 2).





Figure 2. Canopian dome above the altar of St. George's Church.

This dome erected on four columns, the columns carries a square shape, topped by octagonal shape .Above octagonal shape there is a dome shaped like a helmet. The dome is divided into twelve parts. Drawed inside the dome in each part of it, a Coptic painting. In the first half of the dome we see Jesus in an oval shape carried by four angels, and on the right of Christ stand the angel Michael, and on his left stand the angel Gabriel. On the second half of the dome we see the Virgin Mary sitting on a throne. On her right and left are two angels holding a crown and placing it on the head of the Virgin Mary.

Among the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ were four saints: St. Pachomius the cenobite, communal monasticism "founder of Christian cenobitic monasticism", St. Antonius the great , the father of the monks, St. Macarius the great "the lamb of the desert", and the St. shenoute the great " the archimandrite".

The dome of altar church of St. Mercuriuse is part of acomplex of three church and a convent also dedicated to St. Mercuriuse, "the father of the two swords" in Cairo [7]. It is her date back to thirteenth century. The inside of the dome find a scene depicting Jesus Christ inside a circular shape surrounded by four evangelist Luke, Mark, John and Matthew.Four archangels, Mikhail, Gabriel, Soreal and Sadakil are carrying a circular composition of Christ pantocrator. The artist wrote next to each angel his name in Coptic language (Figure 3).

This heavenly scene confirms the concept and purpose of make dome over the altar or baptistery. The architect and artist wanted to feel the priest who stand in heaven the angels hear his prayers. So the Coptic Canopian element symbolizes the sky.



Figure 3. *The dome of altar church of St. Mercuriuse.*

The drawings of the Canopian dome resemble the altar of church of St. Mercuriuse in Cairo [8], with three Canopian domes, above the altars of the Hanging Church "the church of the holy Virgin", Babylon in Cairo. The interiors of the domes of the three altars, four archangels, Mikhail, Gabriel, Soreal and Sadakil are carrying a circular composition of Christ pantocrator. It is date back to fifteenth century (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The dome of altar the Hanging Church, Babylon in Cairo

Another example is found in St. George's Church in Abnoub, in Assiut Governorate. It is a wooden dome mounted on four cylindrical columns of wood as well. Although it is simple and it is devoid of decorations. But it fulfills the purpose for which it was established. It highlights the importance and sanctity of the place.

The dome is built here on four pendentives between four semi- circular arches (Figure 5). On the edge of one of the contracts from the outside, there is a inscription written by Thuluth script it executed by incised relief. " o Lord remind your servants, the carpenters, Mikhail Yuosef and his brother Bashay in Egypt, 1926 AD 1642 for martyrs, Abu Makar" (figure 6).The inscription in Aribic:

"1642 ق أذكر يارب عبدك النجارين مخائيل وأخيه بشاي بمصر 1926م أبو مقار".

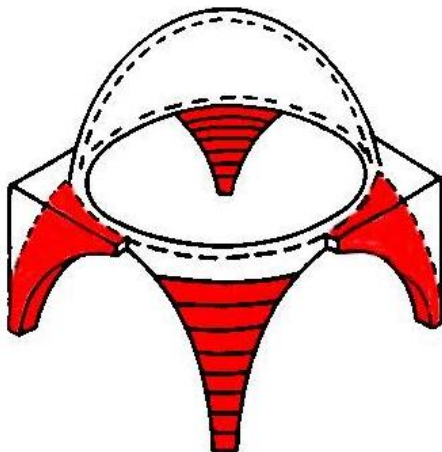


Figure 5.Design to dome of St. George's Church in Abnoub, in Assiut Governorate.



Figure 6. Dome of St. George's Church in Abnoub, in Assiut Governorate.

In the church of St. John the Baptist in the city of Minia in the government of Minia, the main central altar covers a beautiful wooden shallow vault. It is built on four spiral wooden columns with a wooden vault over its. There in four sides, band of embossing decoration by foliage decoration, and demoration decoration. Each side has a cross in a circle, called the "dedicate stamping", and the decoration was executed by the wood carving "Oyama". On the dome in front wrote inside rectangular shape in language Greek "EIS MNHMHHN EYAGGADY-ABHMAS DAPANH MICAH DATIKR_IH" (Figure7).





Figure 7. The church of St. John the Baptist in Minia, Egypt

Conclusions

- The Canopian dome was designed by the architect to symbolize it to the sky. The sanctity of the altar or the baptistery built above it shows the importance of the architectural element (altar - baptism). The dome gives him a kind of sanctity and reverence.
- This type of domes was built on various architectural elements, such as baptisteries, altars, ambons, fountains, a bishop's chair and thrones of kings. But the most common elements are the altars and baptisteries. The architect wanted and intended to accentuate the architectural element at the bottom of the dome. It refers to the importance of this place and gives it a kind of sanctity and reverence.
- The paintings of the artist confirmed the idea that the Canopic dome above the altar or baptism symbolizes the sky. The artist depicted the scene of Christ carried by the four archangels.
- The dome above the bishop's chair symbolizes holiness and reverence as the successor to Christ on earth. While the dome above the king's throne symbolizes the power granted to him by God. The ancient Egyptians were look to the king as the god who lives on earth. Mentioned in the Bible the God chose kings, he was send one of his prophets to sit the king on the throne in front of all the people. So the dome was become symbolize to the sky.

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