

Original article

CONSECRATION SEALS IN COPTIC ARCHITECTURE FROM THE 5TH CENTURY TO THE 12TH CENTURY AD: ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract:

This paper aims simply at the consecration and inauguration of Coptic and Christian religious facilities by placing the sign of the cross inside a circle on the walls. This idea was invented by the Copts, who drew or engraved circular seals on the walls as an imitation of the seals used on documents and correspondence. The purpose is to declare that the place has officially become dedicated to God, consecrated, and sacred. Just as a seal legitimizes a document or correspondence, the consecration seal legitimizes the building, signifying the obligation to pray there with the permission of the bishop, the pope, or the abbot of the monastery. This applies to both the church, the monastery, and the monastic congregations spread inside caves and grottoes.

1. Introduction

The invention of seals is unique to the country of Mesopotamia, which then moved to other countries Such as Syria, Afghanistan, Egypt, Sudan, and Iran. The use of seals on significant historical occurrences and religious rituals performed inside temples is the first conceptual foundation for the invention of printing in the history of human cognition [1-4]. The inhabitants of the Levant were the first to use the seal in the third millennium BC; it was used to seal jars and other items. The shapes were engraved in reverse on the surface of the seal, so it appears correct after printing it, fig. (1-a). In the Akkadian era (2350-2150 BC), the seal became related to and expressed by its owner, the subject of depicting the gods on the seal since the year 2150 BC has been of particular importance, especially «God of the weather» "Adad". As the Babylonians portrayed the symbol of God instead of his painting, the Assyrians adopted the same practice. The goddess Ishtar was symbolized by the symbol of the eight stars, God of the sun by the sun, Anu by the fixed sky, Nanar by the moon, and Bel or Baal by the earth [5]. On the walls of one of the pharaonic tombs dating back to the era of the old kingdom, specifically the sixth dynasty,

a drawing representing the industry of seals was found, which is evidence that, this industry has existed for a long-time [6] fig. (1-b).

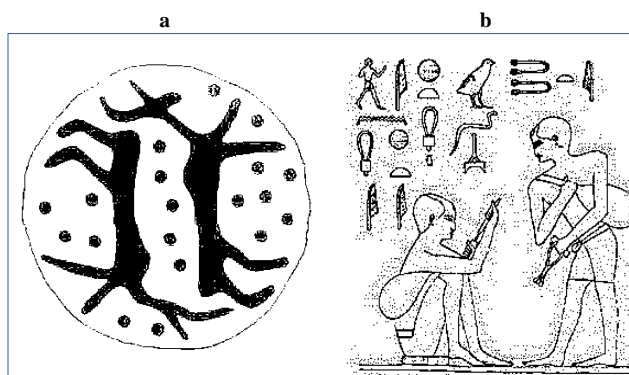


Figure (1) a. a seal of the limestone, carries an inscription for two bulls in two opposite positions, Ork, Iraq about 3000 BC. (After Naji, 1985), b. a drawing that represents the seals industry from the era of the old kingdom, the sixth dynasty in (2290-2135). (After: Hartung, 1998).

Generally, the shapes of seals in ancient Egypt can be divided into the following groups [7,8]. 1) Cylindrical-shaped seals [9],

the earliest type of seal commonly used in Egypt, dating back to the pre-dynastic period [7]. 2) Flat base seals, this group includes, hemi-cylinder and cone shaped seals, button-shaped seals, scarab-shaped seals [10], plaques, other miscellaneous forms, and signet rings [8]. They were made of wood, bone, clay, or stone [11,12] including faience [13]. The concept of making and using seals was transferred to the Copts during the Coptic era. Although few references discuss the seals used in documents and writings, there is a lack of information on sealing walls in Coptic Christian architecture during this period, which we will discuss in detail in this research. One of the oldest seals dating back to the Coptic era is a bronze seal preserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo under the number 5751[14]. The seal is oval in shape, engraved with a unique and rare cross at the top that resembles the Ankh sign. On each side of the cross is a triple leaf that resembles the shape of an ace on a playing card. The cross ends with two plant stems emerging from its end. This unique shape of the cross was not found before, except in this seal used in documents and correspondence during the Coptic era, fig. (2). Just as the purpose of sealing documents in the Coptic era was to consecrate and allocate them to their owner, so that they would be under his responsibility, Seals were also drawn and engraved on the walls of churches and Coptic monasteries with different shapes of the cross in order to be dedicated to God and follow Christian worship. This will be explained in detail in this research.



Figure (2) a Coptic bronze seal preserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo under the number 5751. (After: Gabra, 2005)

2. From Sealing Documents to Sealing Walls

The concept of using a seal in documents has evolved to include the engraving or drawing of seals on walls; it can be seen on one of the cylindrical Akkadian seals that were found during the excavations of Tell El-Haririin, Iraq, fig. (3). The seal depicts a scene inside a temple where two figures, a man and his wife, are shown making offerings to a deity. Additionally, a quadrilateral star is depicted on the wall [15,16]. This portrayal marks the emergence of the first seal of consecration [17]. The ancient Egyptians were known for sealing their graves [18]. It was also mentioned that Darius the Mede, king of the Chaldeans, ordered the sealing of the den of lions [19]. The ancient Egyptians dedicated buildings, whether temples or tombs, by placing the name of the owner or the deity of the temple inside a vertical or horizontal rectangular shape. The name of the deity, or goddess, was mentioned next to the name of the founder of the temple. It was written inside a rectangular geometric shape known as «serekh», but from the era of Snefru, it became known as «Ren» which means

«name». It later evolved into a circular shape called «Shen» which means surrounds, halo, or ring [20]. Hence, the name of the temple or the cemetery became dedicated to the name of the pharaoh or the sacred deity, which is placed inside a specific form that distinguishes it from the surrounding writings. this custom passed to the Copts, who were influenced by their ancient Egyptian ancestors. Then the habit of sealing the walls was transmitted to the Greeks, and each temple became dedicated to a specific god. St. Paul the Apostle found it in Athens; an altar was written on it "for the unknown God". [21]. It was also mentioned in the Gospel of St. Matthew that the chief priests and the Pharisees sealed the stone that was placed on the door of the tomb in which the body of the Lord Christ was laid [22].



Figure (3) a cylindrical seal image represents a god sits on a seat with four lists and a man who is close to him with donations, the late Akkadian era 2390-2290 BC. (Mary - Tel Hariri). (After: Omar, 2008)

3. Consecration Seals in Coptic Architecture

The idea of consecration seals was related to the Coptic architect or the Coptic artist through historical and religious events mentioned in the Bible, such as God's command to the prophet Moses that every one of God's people strike the two doorposts and upper lintel of the entrances of their homes in Egypt with blood, it would be a sign and indication that those houses belong to God's people [23]. In later periods, the seal of consecration was used to allocate any place or thing to God and prohibit it for anything other than God, so it is called "the house of God." The prophet Nehemiah sealed the chiefs, the Levites, and the priests to be forbidden to strangers and other peoples, to be devoted to God only [24]. In the first mention clearly to consecration or dedication of the parts of the church from inside in written s' historians, what would have been mentioned was Aba Uossab bishop of Fowa in his written entitled "The patriarch's history," which he says: "The patriarch Aba Ghapryal Abn Trak 70th (1131-1145 AC) the first one to innovate the wooden board to put on the iconostasis," that wooden board bearing a sacred writing and a date for consecration and dedication [25]. But there is much evidence to prove that the concept of consecration in Coptic churches dates back to the 7th century AC. That is what we will present in full detail. During the first centuries of Christianity, when persecution intensified, Christians began using ancient Greek and Roman catacombs for prayer. A secret sign was engraved on its walls that only Christians could understand, which is a rectangle or a circle engraved on the wall, in the middle of which is the shape of an anchor or a ship's hilt, and around it is a fish from the left and the right. The fish symbolize the believers, and the anchor symbolizes Jesus

Christ, fig. (4-a) [26]. It is a sign for Christians's congregations who enter this place that is dedicated to prayer and that it was dedicated in the name of the Lord Christ. This was the first clear indication of consecration seals in Christian architecture in general. But after the victory of Constantine and the declaration of freedom of worship, Edict of Milan [27,28], throughout the Byzantine Empire, the seals of consecration began to appear clearly on the walls of the churches. In the first, it has taken a rectangular shape, after that it has been changed to a circular shape, resembling holy bread (The communion) with a cross inside, or a circular shape of olive branches or laurel wreaths with a cross has an equal end, fig. (4-b). During the reign of the righteous King Theodosius the Great and Pope Theophilus 23 [29,30], seals were painted abundantly, clearly, and publicly, artists competed in decorating them, especially when Christianity was declared as an official religion of the country, pagan worship was abolished, and temples were converted into churches. All temples are subjected to the disposal of the Patriarch; therefore, they were sealed with circular consecration seals that bear within it the shape of the sign of the cross, or a bust of Christ (portrait). It gets over here, re-dedicating the place and inaugurating it to serve the name of God. No religious Coptic building is devoid of these seals, which confirm its religious importance, and the purpose of its creation is to historicize, consecrate, and dedicate the building; it is not decorative. Just as the seal gives legitimacy to a document or correspondence, so the consecration seal gives legitimacy to the building and the obligation to pray in it with the permission of the bishop, the pope, or the abbot of the monastery. This applies to both the church, the monastery, and the monastic congregations spread inside caves and grottoes.



Figure (4) **a.** an old relief dated the third century is an anchor and thickness, **b.** a cross of stone in the Monastery of St. Shenouda in Sohag dated eighth century AD, (After: Strong, 1971)

4. Results

Through above mentioned data, the following results were extracted:

- 1) The appearance of elements in architecture and the arts. Researchers thought for years that they were merely decorative elements in that they were consecration seals with a religious and historical purpose.
- 2) Consecration seals were used to consecrate and sanctify all of the Topos, monasteries, and churches.
- 3) Consecration seals were not a new idea in the Coptic period, as they were found in both ancient Egypt and the Greco-Roman era, as previously mentioned.

- 4) In the Islamic era, the ranks were considered an extension of the idea of consecration seals.
- 5) The study showed that there is a difference between the Topos, the monastery, the church, and the consecration seals that were found in them.
- 6) Consecration seals appeared from the fourth century AD until the 16th century AD. Its forms are divided into two parts: from the 4th to the 10th century AD, and from the 11th to the 16th century AD.
- 7) The study of the Coptic texts revealed a new name that expresses the areas of monastic congregations. No one has mentioned it before, and it is "Topos", which is synonymous with the word "Skete", the cells area, or an area that contains more than one monastery. It means exactly the site or the place. The idiom of Topos transferred to Greek mathematics scientists, who used the same mean to indicate a gathering, congregation, or set. In mathematics, a topos is a category that behaves like the category of sheaves of sets on a topological space (or more generally: on a site). Topoi behave much like the category of sets and possess a notion of localization; they are a direct generalization of point-set topology.
- 8) The study showed that the area that includes the monastery of Anba Yahnes, Mallawi, and the monastery of Anba Bishoy in Barsha, Mallawi, and Minya is called Topos Anba Makar, or topos Makarios. The topos include several monasteries, each named after its president, which was not known before. Abba Macarius, or Abba Macarius the Great, is the spiritual father of all the monks who lived in the region.
- 9) The study showed that Papia, son of Meliton, was one of the major heads of monasteries who lived in the area east of Malawi in Minya. Thus, the area, or topos of Anba Makar, includes three monasteries known so far: the Monastery of Anba Bishoy, the Monastery of Anba Yahannes, and the Monastery of Anba Babai ibn Melitos.
- 10) As noticed that the cross at the end of the Greek text is different from the cross at the end of the Coptic text. This gives clear evidence of the shape of the cross in Christian art, between the Coptic cross and the Greek cross. This invalidated the theory that the Coptic cross is longer than the Greek cross.

5. Analytical Study of Seals

The idea of the inauguration with oil came when Jacob (the father of the tribes) saw in a dream a ladder ascending from the earth to the sky, The Lord was standing on it, so Jacob took the stone after waking up and poured oil on top of it. [31]. It is understood from this story that the place in which God's name is blessed must be dedicated to him. The seals of consecration had specifications and a shape that could be distinguished; therefore, the seals of consecration were called. The most important element that clearly distinguishes it is the drawing of the cross in its various styles and shapes with a circle around it; the circle symbolizes eternity and the beginning without end, "a perpetual endowment to the Lord". The seal is placed in a clear place that distinguishes it only, without merging with other decorations or other elements. The seal of consecration is distinguished by the drawing of

olive or palm branches, either in the shape of a circle around the cross, or olive and palm branches distributed on both sides of the cross.

5.1. Forms

Through the study, it was inferred that the consecration seals were classified into several shapes according to the historical period and the artistic features of the age, as follows:

5.1.1. The shapes of seals from the 4th to the 10th centuries AD

During the first centuries of Christianity, beginning from the fourth century until the 10th century AD, the crosses of consecration or the seals of consecration were painted with red ink or shaped in prominent engravings on stone or wood. The seals of consecration were not only placed on churches, temples, and inside monasteries, but its design was found, whether by engraving or drawing, in the caves of hermits in all the deserts of Egypt. A large group of equilateral Coptic consecration seals was found in the caves of the New Valley desert in the Dakhla Oasis, fig. (5), drawn inside a circle in red ink and surrounded by Coptic writings of the names of the great saints and hermits who lived in this area, so the place would be blessed by them and dedicated to the service and worship of God, fig. (5).

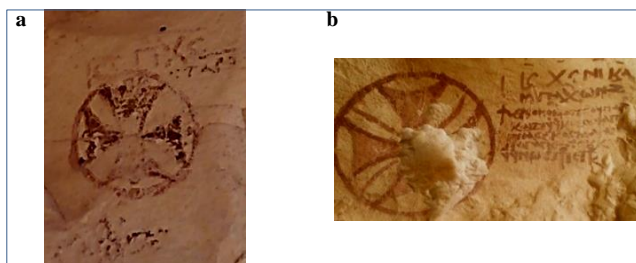


Figure (5) the consecration seal at caves of the New Valley desert in the Dakhla Oasis.

This period combined two methods: the 1st simple method, which is a result of the impact of living and political conditions on that period, and what it included of religious persecution and aversion to Christian worship, which increased the life of isolation, austerity, and extreme asceticism among the monks. Monasticism was still in its infancy, in the stage of living in caves. Therefore, all the consecration seals that have been found are just simple drawings of the shape of the cross executed with red ink. It was also found in the Al-Barsha caves, Bani Hassan caves, and the New Valley desert, or the use of old facilities dating back to previous civilizations such as temples and cemeteries and converting them into churches. During that period, the crosses inside seals were drawn according to Coptic and Greek art. The most famous form of the Coptic cross is the horned cross, which continued to be used until after the 10th century AD. The most famous form of the Greek cross is the simple one with one end, or equilateral. After the recognition of Christianity, consecration seals were executed according to an exquisite artistic style that was not impacted by political or economic conditions, such as the tomb of the Bani Hassan al-Shorouk church in Minya, fig. (6) [32] Karnak and Luxor temples, and other temples that were used as churches.

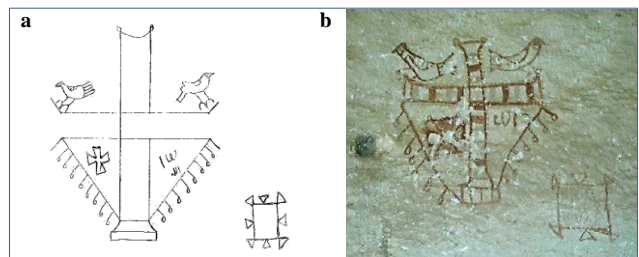


Figure (6) consecration seal on a wall of tomb church in Bani Hassan al-Shorouk 5-6 AD. (After: Samuel, 2012)

The 2nd simple, which lasted from the 6th century AD until the 10th century AD, it is the period of artistic creativity in Coptic architecture and arts. The artist skillfully makes the seals of consecration on stone slabs added to the building, or executed by prominent or intaglio engraving on separate parts or various architectural elements inside the building, the most important of which are the marble columns. That was found in the area of Bawit, Ṭāḥā al A'midah, and the Monastery of Anba Shenouda in Sohag in the 8th century AD, the facade of the fortress of Deir al-Muharraq in Assiut, and the rare example of the Cross of Consecration in the caves of Aba Yahnes, next to the Church of Saint Qalta the Physician in Malawi, Minya, fig. (7).

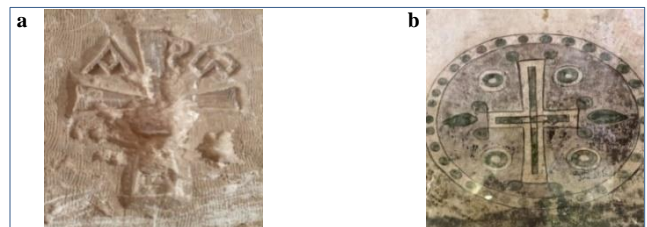


Figure (7) a. consecration cross in the caves of Aba Yahnes, next to the church of Saint Qalta the Physician in Malawi, Minya, (Pub. for 1st time).

5.1.2. The shapes of seals from the 11th to the 16th centuries AD.

The seals of consecration during this period, tab. (1), were distinguished by the fact that they were executed with drawings, but in almost the same shapes as those carried out with engravings or with red ink in the previous era, which was previously mentioned. Multiple colors were added to these seals, bright and dark, and next to them are Coptic writings that are attached to a consecration or founding text. Examples of these are the seals of consecration in the Monastery of Saint Anthony Coptic Orthodox in the Red Sea, the church of Deir El-Ganadla in Assiut, the Monastery of Saint Abo Fana, fig. (8), and Abba Bshia monastery, also known as the Red monastery in Sohag.

Table (1) a graphical and statistical chart of consecration seals from the 4th to the 17th centuries AD.

Substance	Period		
	4 AD-10 AD	11 AD-16 AD	17 AD-19 AD
Red Ink	5	1	0
Black Ink	3	1	0
Plaster	1	5	1
Stone	5	3	0
Colors	0	1	4

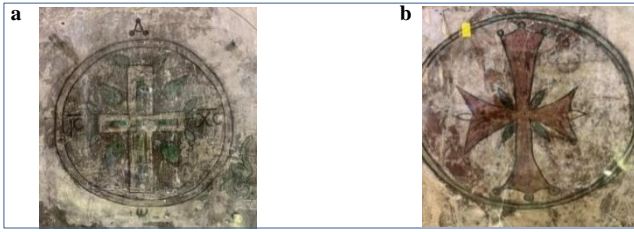


Figure (8) consecration seal in church of monastery of Saint Abo Fana, (*Pub. for 1st time*).

5.1.3. From the 17th century AD to the 19th century AD

Consecration seals in this period, tab. (1), were impacted by the stages of Coptic art's decline, therefore, the shapes of consecration seals were decreased in that period, and faded colors and a lack of multi-color were found, contrary to the previous period, which was known for the multi-color, clarity, and richness of its decorations, this can be seen in the Church of the Virgin Mary in the Monastery of Riva in Assiut, fig. (8) [33].



Figure (8) consecration seal in church of the Virgin Mary in the Monastery of Riva in Assiut, (*After: Samuel, 2015*)

5.1.4. The method of execution

The process of applying seals on the walls to be consecrated and inaugurated was executed in different Methods, the most important of which was red ink, or black carbon, as can be seen in, it was also done by digging or relief inside a circle. These methods were not done randomly, especially if they were drawing consecration seals inside a church, cemetery, or temple that will be converted into a church. During a ceremony, the bishop or patriarch recites the ritual of consecration or dedication, and anoints the walls and icons with the holy chrism oil, thus, the place has been consecrated in the name of God and to serve God only. As a sign of the sanctity of the place and that it has been consecrated by the bishop, the seals of consecration are placed in different parts of the church. Consecration seals shall be applied in places far from obscuring, drawn, or engraved in a wide area devoid of any decorations, as evidence of their importance and that wasn't intended for decoration.

6. The Oldest Consecration Seals that Appeared on Christian buildings

It became clear from the previous study that the seal of consecration was used to consecrate a new place, inaugurate a church, or consecrate it. There is clear, indubitable evidence of this found in the Zabad inscription, which indicates that the rest of the countries neighboring Egypt were influenced by the idea of consecration seals. It's clarified from the Zabad fig. (9-a), inscription dated 511-512 AD., which was placed at the time of the inauguration of the Church of St. Sergius. A circular seal of consecration was found in the middle, with

a horned cross on either side of it, the letter Alpha and Omega, which symbolize Christ the beginning and the end. The inscription reads as follows: "In the victory of God: Sargo Baramt Manfu, Helia Barmar Al-Qais, Sargo Bar Saad, Straw and Sergo". Next to this inscription, which could be considered Nabataean Arabic, two inscriptions were found with it, one Greek and the other Syriac, dated in the year 512 AH [34-36], the text of this inscription is as follows:

"In the victory of God: Sargo Baramt Manfou, Helia Barmar Al-Qais, and Sargo Bar Saad, Straw and Sergo"
(In the victory of God: Sergius bin Amit - Memphis, Haylia bin Mar Al-Qais, Sergios bin Saad, Setter, and Sergios) [37].

Another Nabataean Arab inscription with a Greek text was found in Harran al-Lagah in the northern region of Jabal al-Druze, dating back to 568 AD [38]. This also emphasizes, that the rest of the countries neighboring Egypt were influenced by the idea of consecration seals. An inscription was found in a church St John the Baptist inside which was a monumental mausoleum for the martyrs. fig. (9-b) and dated to the year (463 AD). The wording of this inscription is as follows: "I'm Sharhail bin Zalmo, I built this al-Martul in the year 463, a year after the corruption of Khaibar" [35,38]. A Greek text was found next to the Arabic text, and it was translated as follows: "Sharheel bin Talmo, the Philarch, this mausoleum was built for St John in the year 463, and the memory of the writer will remain." fig. (9-b). In the middle of the Nabataean text, the seal of consecration was found in the shape of a circle with a cross of equal sides, which indicates the relation of the consecration seal with the founding, inauguration, or consecration of the church.

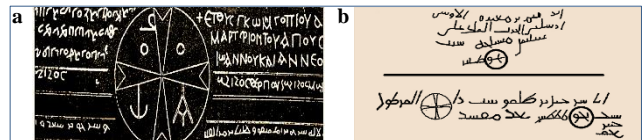


Figure (9) a. consecration seal of the churches established for St. Sergius in the city of Zabad, (*After: Al-Basha, 1999*), b. consecration seals of church of St John the Baptist in Harran, (*After: Al-Samarrai, 2001*).

7. Consecration Seals Affected Islamic Civilization

Undoubtedly, the consecration seals were transmitted to Islamic civilization, but they appeared with another name, which is rank [39,40]. This emblem was taken by the sultans and princes from the 6th century AH, or 12th century AD, until the end of the 9th century AH, or 15th century AD, and it appeared on their buildings to indicate their ownership of it, as it was engraved on the sultans' coins of dinars, dirhams, and copper coins as a right and a privilege for them [39,40]. This purpose is related to the subject of the study. The rank has been known since ancient times, although its meaning differed in the past from its meaning in the Middle Ages, as it was previously related to beliefs and religions. The ancient Egyptians took fish as a symbol of life and an emblem of the god Osiris. The god Isis was symbolized with two fish facing each other with lotus flowers. The eagle was chosen as a symbol and emblem of strength during the days of the Hittites and the Greeks [40]. The ranks began to appear on

flags in the Islamic era; the Abbasid emblem was black, and the caliph al-Ma'mun chose the green flag [41]. The slogan of the Fatimids was flag wrote on it "Victory from God and a close conquest", decorated with a drawing of a lion in red and yellow colors [42]. The ranks in the Ayyubid era were of two types, the first type was specific to the sultans. Such as the eagle's rank, was found on the castle of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi. The second type symbolizes the functions of the princes [40]. In the Mamluk era, there was a distinction between sophistication and luxury. Ranks are engraved on the facades of the buildings of sultans and princes, as well as on antiques of all types [43]. The rank of the cross in the Mamluk era symbolized the Christians who had the responsibility of Diwan in the Mamluk era, fig. (10) [39,44]. It was mentioned that Sultan Faraj bin Barquq took over the school of Jamal al-Din al-Ustadar erased his rank, and engraved rank of the Sultan. In the Ottoman era, Khair Bey "the ruler of Egypt", threatened the people of Egypt, that whoever did not stay in his residence. He will engrave his rank on his house. This indicates that the rank was engraved on everything that pertains to the Sultan or the prince, and its engraving on the establishment indicates his ownership of it [40]. The Islamic ranks that appear on the facades of buildings, antiques, and applied arts are only a normal extension of the seals of consecration. In the Islamic era, the ranks were considered an extension of the idea of consecration seals. The Islamic ranks that appear on the facades of buildings, antiques, and applied arts are only a normal extension of the seals of consecration. These signs identify its owner and indicate that he is the one who built this structure, ordered its construction, or manufactured this masterpiece. If we see the seal of the cross, or what is known as the seal of consecration, on a facility; we infer that it symbolizes Jesus Christ as the owner of this establishment, or that it symbolizes that this institution has been consecrated and has become an endowment and devote for the Christian religion. This is also the case in Islamic Ranks. The same idea was transferred to the Islamic era.



Figure (10) rank of the cross in Mamluk period in Egypt, (After: Abd al-Razeq, 1974).

8. Discussion

8.1. Study of consecration seal models

There are two types of consecration seals that appear in Coptic and Christian architecture. The 1st type is a consecration seal specific to belief (Christianity) that was called a religious or doctrinal consecration seal, which is a symbol of faith and Christianity. The 2nd type is a consecration seal specific to the person (Christ or saint) whose name the place was consecrated. That was called a personal consecration seal, which is a symbol for a person (emblem), both of which mean that

the church or a monastery is dedicated in the name of Christ or one of the saints.

8.1.1. The seals of consecration in the skete of Maqar in Mallwy «Topos of the saint Appa Makar».

This unique collection of consecration seals, discovered with the skete of St. Macarius in Deir El-Barsha, is a confirmation of the previously explained idea and an illustration of the purpose for which the consecration seals were created in Coptic architecture.

8.1.2. The seal of the first consecration in Topos of Mac-aruis

- **Shape:** circular, fig. (11)
- **Type:** religious seal
- **Dimensions:** 1.20" x 1.20".
- **Material and technique:** Engraved on limestone.
- **Date:** It dates back to 418 AD.
- **Location:** the caves of Deir Abba Yahnes in Malawi (St. John), southeast of Deir El Barsha-Minya-Egypt.
- **Description:** One of the most wonderful and beautiful seals of consecration is found in rocky caves in Egypt. It is located in one of the caves of the mountain, next to the cave church of Saint Anba Qalta the Doctor. The inscription contains inscriptions on the left sides of the consecration seal. The writing on the left is in Greek, and the writing on the right is in Sahidic Coptic. Both of them are for the same text. It is a regular circle tapered from inside and outside, editing palm fronds, its dimensions are 1.20x1.20 m. Inside it is an equidistant Coptic cross on its right and left, and from above, a dove topped with twinning grape branches, hanging grapes, and bells, on the right and left of the cross, from the bottom of its winged diffuser eagle with palm branches, fig. (6). The circle ends from the bottom in the middle with two plant branches, one from the left and the other from the right, and ends spirally from the same branch, on the right and left of this huge seal with a 21-line plain inscription, but unfortunately large parts of the left lines are lost and the right lines remain clearly visible as following text:

1- +παπαπυε
 2- εννελετωνος
 3- πασαυροσαξε
 4- τονθμνοσην
 5- οουμητην
 6- παρμεαοτη
 7- ζιδικ
 8- αγκααζι
 9- πτοποσι
 10- παγιος
 11- απαμακαρ
 12- ερεπωτ
 13- πυρηρην
 14- πεπλαετου
 15- ααβ+ ουαλα
 16- παυσιςιτεε
 17- ψυχη ανηεε
 18- τοποσετουααβ
 19- ανουειρην
 20- ααμην
 21- ενναουηλ
 22- +

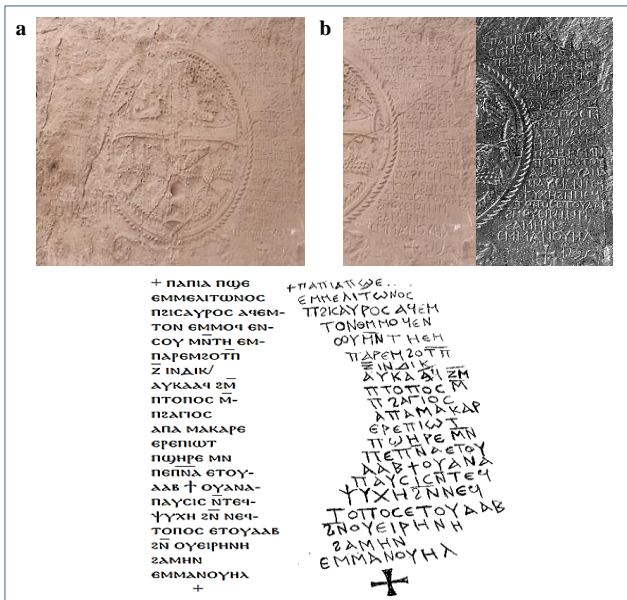


Figure 11 a. & b. the cross of consecration and the Greco-Coptic text inside one of the caves of Deir Abba Maqar, the rocky, Minia, Egypt. c. facsimile of the Greco-Coptic text at previous picture.

Translation: Papias, son of Meliton, the Isaurian, rested on the fifteenth paremhotep of the 7th indiction. he was placed in the topos of saint apa macarius. May the father, the son, and the holy spirit rest his soul in his holy places in peace. Amen, Emmanuel!. It can be clarified from this inscription that is a tombstone for a person called Papias, son of Melito, and it is understood from the inscription that he is a monk who arrived from outside Egypt, to become a monk in Topos Macarius, which has known wrong for over a long time the monastery of Abba Yahnes. This is what Vansleb, Jean-Luc, van Loon, Alain Delattre got wrong [45-8]. He came from an area called (Isauria). It is a mountainous Roman province in southern Anatolia. (Isauria) became part of the region of Galatia and later became the birthplace of the Byzantine Emperor Zeno. Whose reign was known as the Isaurian era. The inscription mentioned the word “Topos of St. Macarius”. Which means a monastery or “Skete” of St. Macarius in the desert of Al-Barsha. Therefore, it is not correct to call this area Deir Abba Yahnes. It can be understood from the inscription written in Coptic and Greek and the huge cross. This was made for an important person, who dedicated this place in his name. He is one of the abbots of the monasteries in Skete Makarios [45]. As for the date of the inscription, the date used is the induction, which is a cycle every 15 years. It is the period for renewing the tax. There are 3 types of it: the first in the year 3 BC, the reign of Augustus Caesar. The year 287 AD was the period of the rule of Diocletian, and the year 313 AD was the period of the rule of Constantine the Great. The latter is the most famous and is used in Coptic texts. This calendar uses the same Coptic months, so the inscription mentions the month of Baramhat. This inscription is dated to the Coptic month of Baramhat during the seventh year of the financial calendar of King Constantine (the Great), which corresponds to the year 418 AD. The financial calendar of King Constantine is a fiscal period of fifteen years used as a means of dating events and transactions in the Byzantine

Empire and in the papal and some royal courts. The system was instituted by Emperor Constantine in AD 313 and was used until the 16th century in some places [49]. Fournet made a mistake in dating the text by returning it to the 6th century AD., fig. (12) [48]. Based on the induction date, 7 years of induction time 15 years (the time of one induction year) equals 105 years, in addition to 313 AD., the year in which Constantine the Great established the induction date. Thus, the date of the inscription is 418 AD., that is, the fifth century AD., not the sixth. He also made a mistake when he thought that Baramhat 15 corresponded to March 15.

• The Greek text

- 1- [+] ἔνθα κατάκειται (l. κατάκειται)
- 2- Παπιας Μ[ελί-]
- 3- τωνος [ὁ Ψ-]
- 4- σαύρι[ος ἐν]
- 5- μενὶ Μαρτίου [ἰε]
- 6- ζ ἰνδικ(τίωνος)
- 7- ἐν τῇ μο-
- 8- νῆ τοῦ
- 9- ἁγίου
- 10- ἄπα Μα-
- 11- καρίου
- 12- Ἐμμανου-
- 13- ἦλ ἀμήν]
- 14- +

Translation:

Here rests Papias, son of Meliton, the Isaurian, on March 15 of the 7th indication in the monastery of Apa Macarius. Emmanuel, amen!?”



Figure 12) the cross of consecration and the Greco-Coptic text inside one of the caves of Deir Abba Maqar, the rocky, Minia, Egypt, (After: Delattre, 2010).

Unfortunately, many parts of the Greek inscription have now been lost, fig. (9) and only the last three lines remain, so reliance was placed on Fournet's writings [48]. It was the first one to take a picture of this inscription by De Feynol in 1963, Pl.1, without a detailed and analytical study [50].

- [+] ἔνθα κατάκειται (l. κατάκειται)
- Παπιας Μ[ελί-]
- τωνος [ὁ Ψ-]
- σαύρι[ος ἐν]
- μενὶ Μαρτίου [ἰε]
- ζ ἰνδικ(τίωνος)
- ἐν τῇ μο-
- νῆ τοῦ
- ἁγίου
- ἄπα Μα-
- καρίου
- Ἐμμανου-
- ἦλ ἀμήν
- +

Because of the loss of the lines of the Greek inscription of which only the last three lines remain. Consequently, Fournet tried to transfer of copy from the Coptic text to restore the Greek text. So, he made a mistake in writing the date of the text and dating of the text by making Baramhat 15 equal to March 15, knowing that the Coptic calendar does not correspond with the Roman calendar. Also, notice that the cross at the end of the Greek text differs from the cross at the end of the Coptic text. This is what gives clear evidence in the shape the Cross in Christian art between the Coptic cross and the Greek cross.

8.1.3. The second consecration seal

- **Shape:** Rectangle
- **Type:** personalized seal, fig. (13)
- **Dimensions:** 1.50m x 0.90m
- **Material and technique:** Engraved on limestone
- **Date:** It dates back to the month of Misri in the year 403 AD
- **Location:** Skete (Topos) of St. Macarius near the caves of Deir Abba Hans in Malawi, southeast of Deir El Barsha - Minya - Egypt.
- **Publication:** It is published for the first time
- **The description:** It is a rectangular carving, at the top, it includes a decorative vegetal shape which is made of editing palm branches, above it a row of Coptic inscriptions was found as follows:

ΕΙΣ ΘΕΟCΩΒΩΗΘΩΝ ΕΜΑΝΟΥΗΛ ΘΑΜΗΝ

Translation:

“The one God Emmanouel Amen.”

Inside the seal, below the botanical decorative band, an inscription was found in three lines of the Coptic language that had the name of a deceased person for whom this seal engraved in the stone was made in that holy place (Topos Abba Makar) to be blessed and intercede for him, as well as a sacrifice for the soul of the deceased, the inscription, fig. (13). is as follows:

ΑΑΒΡΑΔΑΜ	ΑΝΕΓΑΥΕΟ
ΤΣΕΝΚΩΘΩ	ΜΕCΟΥΡΗ
[]	ΙC Ζ ΙΝΔΙΚ

Translation:

Abraham	Angelo
.....	Mesori
[]	16 th 6 th indiction.

The inscription is dated here on the sixteenth of the Coptic month of Misri for the sixth year of the financial calendar of King Constantine (the Great), corresponding to the year 403 AD. Below those Coptic inscriptions, a medallion of laurel branches was found, from which plant stems extend towards the Coptic inscriptions up to the sides of the rectangular frame, and from below emerge wavy plant stems that end in spirals. A bas-relief was found, but it is completely shattered, it seems that it was for a human face, which indicates that this seal is a seal of personal dedication.



Figure (13) personalized seal Skete of St. Macarius in Malawi, Minya, Egypt.

8.1.4. The third seal of consecration

- **Shape:** Rectangular in the shape of a cartouche.
- **Type:** personalized seal, fig. (14)
- **Dimensions:** 0.30"×0.15".
- **Material and technique:** Engraved on limestone
- **Date:** There is no clear date, but it seems to be during the fifth century.
- **Location:** Skete (Topos) of St. Macarius near the caves of Deir Abba Hans in Malawi, southeast of Deir El Barsha - Minya - Egypt.
- **Publication:** It is published for the first time.
- **The description:** It is a rectangular shape; a triangular shape was drawn at both of its left and right ends. Inside it, an ankh sign was drawn, and then the word “victor” was written in Coptic letters as follows:

ϯ ΒΙΚΤΩΡ Victor

It seems that he was one of the hermits who lived in the area, perhaps his place of residence was the cave in which this inscription was discovered., which is another evidence that the idea of consecration seals was widespread in that period and continued after that, it is evolved from the rectangular shape to the circular one. It also seems that this type of seal is older, since it was influenced by the ancient Egyptian cartouche, in which the name of the king is written



Figure (14) personalized seal Skete of St. Macarius in Malawi, Minya, Egypt

8.1.5. The seal of consecration in the ancient tomb of Deir Rifeh

- **Shape:** A square and circular seal is a repeating element within a decorative band.
- **Type:** religious seal, fig. (15)
- **Dimensions:** 0.30" x 1.68".
- **Material and artistic style:** Engraved on a slab of marble [51].

- **Date:** There is no clear date, but it seems to be during the fifth century.
- **Location:** The northern wall of the tomb No. 4 in the ancient Egyptian tombs of Deir Rifeh, reused by Coptic Christian monks.
- **Publication:** cited in Griffith [51].
- **The description:** It is wide decorative shape that revolves around the cemetery on its walls; parts of which remain that indicate the idea of consecrating the place and inaugurating it before using it. Wonderful and unique, the shape has a different group of consecration seals in wonderful and a unique style; it starts with a square seal that contains a swastika. The repetition of this element is separated by several consecration seals of different shapes, the most prominent of which is a circular shape consisting of beads, inside which is a Coptic cross, and out from its angles four pomegranates. The second shape is a square seal, with a style of horned Coptic cross, and equilateral. We can see the pomegranate fruit growing from the corners of this seal, fig. (15). The use of pomegranate fruit is a strong indication the architecture was dedicated and inaugurated before the prayer. The pomegranate fruit was used in the past in the inauguration of the sanctuary and the clothes of the priests [52,53]. It is a symbol of abundant benevolence and a long extending life [53]. There are a very large number of references to the pomegranate in the Bible [54]. Around the seals of consecration within the decorative shape were written inscriptions above and below, the date of the consecration of the place, and the name of the bishop responsible for that monastic congregation. Its text is as follows:

The 1st line:

..... fhapeh epw neh nnechy ntau sphice
aucmn pro ncarakunou icwgi

The 2nd line:

..... eyroc ppar,yc pickopoc ntyc
poleoc antio,ia iu,u w

The 1st line:

... .. keep his life secure for many long years and
extending.

The 2nd line:

..... Arius, Archbishop of the city of Antioch.

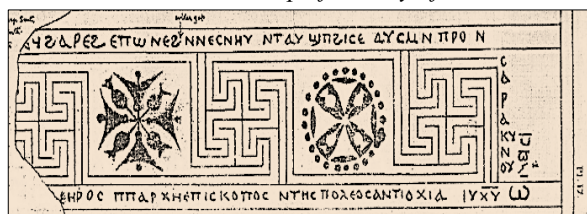


Figure (15) a set of crosses engraved on a slab of marble for consecration seals around it a Coptic inscription, (After: Griffith, 1889).

8.1.6. The seal of consecration in the monastery of Abba Jeremiah, Saqqara

- **Shape:** Circular seal in the middle of a rectangular plate.
- **Type:** Religious seal, fig. (16).
- **Dimensions:** 0.38 cm×100 cm
- **Material and technique:** Carved out on limestone
- **History:** There is no clear date, but it seems to date back to the sixth century.

- **Location:** preserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo No. 8251.
- **Publication:** cited in Gabra and Eaton [14].
- **The description:** It is a consecration seal consisting of a Coptic cross inside a circle of palm leaves with shapes resembling a small circle on its edge. In the middle of the seal is an equilateral cross. From the bottom of the seal emerge four branches of palm to the right and the left. The circle refers to eternity, and the palm tree symbolizes peace. The arms of the cross are decorated with intertwined decorative shapes called braid decoration and pointed plant leaves emerge from the corner of the cross. Jabra mentioned that: "The sculptor rendered all the details of his well-balanced design with unified expertise. The raised border on the four sides of the rectangular stone slab shows that the piece is not a fragment, but it is basically complete. It served as the cornerstone of one of the upper courses near the ceiling." It is a distinctive and single decorative piece that has its own independent and dedicated function. It is placed in the middle of the wall to be visible to all [14].



Figure (16) a relief featuring the cross inside the circle, Abba Jeremiah, Saqqara, preserved in the Coptic Museum, (After: Gabra & Eaton, 2005)

8.1.7. The seal of consecration in the monastery of Anba Apollo Dayrut

- **Shape:** circular seal
- **Type:** Religious seal, fig. (17)
- **Dimensions:** 3.3"×1.65"
- **Material:** Tempera on plaster.
- **Date:** There is no clear date, but it seems to date back to the 6th/7th centuries CE.
- **Location:** Excavations of Bawit, Assuit, Egypt. Preserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo under No. 12089.
- **Publication:** cited in Gabra and Eaton [14].
- **The description:** It is a circular seal or medallion held by two angels. Above the left angel is written in the Coptic language: "aggeloc; eoc" "Angel of God", while above the right angel is also written in the Coptic language: "aggeloc kuriou" "The Angel of the lord". Inside the circle, there is a mural of Jesus Christ, and above it is written in Coptic: "p'cwtyr" "The Savior". It is a removed part of discovered churches in Bawit in 1976 AD, which appear clearly as consecration seal.



Figure (17) a portrait of Jesus Christ inside circle, bear it two angels, Excavations of Bawit, Assiut, Egypt, (After: Gabra and Eaton, 2005)

8.1.8. A set of consecration seals in the Monasteries of St. Bshai and St. Shenouda in Sohag

8.1.8.1. A seal of consecration with red ink in the vestibule west of the courtyard

- **Shape:** circular seal
- **Type:** Religious seal, fig. (18)
- **Dimensions:** 1.20 cm in diameter
- **Material:** red ink on plaster
- **Date:** There is no clear date, but it seems to date back to the 6th/7th centuries CE.
- **Location:** Abba Bshia Monastery in Sohag, the red Monastery [55].
- **Publication:** it is published for the first time.
- **The description:** A round-shaped consecration seal painted with red ink. It is a Coptic cross of equilateral in the middle of a circle with a wide border; the ends of the cross touch the edge of the circle from the inside. In the middle of the cross, at the exact point of intersection, a circle was drawn, and inside it was a small horned Coptic cross. A pointed plant leaf emerged from each of the four corners of the cross. The large main cross was decorated with shapes of overlapping plant stems, forming small circles and lozenges inside it a small cross. On the sides of the cross, a scarf of cloth hangs down, symbolizing the scarlet robe of Christ. On both sides of the cross, from above, was drawn a peacock as an indication of eternity, each peacock holding in its beak a lamp (a candle), which symbolizes the righteous. As for the bottom right and left of the cross, they found two small circles; each of them drew a lamb, which symbolizes redemption. Spread randomly spaced small circles resembling planets in the sky, which indicate the righteous, who will shine like stars in the sky.



Figure (18) consecration seal at Abba Bshia monastery known the red Monastery in Sohag, Egypt.

8.1.8.2. A seal of consecration that includes Saint Abba Bshai

- **Shape:** circular seal.
- **Type:** personalized seal, fig. (19)
- **Dimensions:** 0.90 cm in diameter.
- **Material and artistic style:** painting on plaster.
- **History:** There is no clear date, but it dates back to the 11/12 centuries AD.
- **Location:** Church of St. Bshai, the red monastery in Sohag.
- **Publication:** it is published for the first time.
- **The description:** It is a circular seal above the threshold of the entrance of the sanctuary, it was executed in the center of a rectangular area, in each corner of the rectangle, a multi-petalled Rosetta flower was drawn inside a circle. In the middle is a wreath of laurel plants, which symbolizes victory. Inside it, a mural of St. Shenouda (Shenoute) “the

Archimandrite”, a round face drew the halo of holiness. Confirmation that the piece is a consecration seal. The monastery is dedicated in the name of St. Shenouda. The place is still now called the name of the saint, Anba Shenouda, who is the patron of the place. In addition, a group of stone seals of consecration were found in the Monastery of Anba Shenouda in Sohag, placed and distributed on the walls of the monastery from the outside. These crosses are dated to the 8th century AD, it’s completely similar to the crosses that were mentioned, but they are distinguished by their drawing inside a square and a circle, not only a circular shape, and a circle exists in each corner of the square. Within this group, a cross was found inside a circle resembling holy bread, in the middle of each of the ends of the cross was a prominent round shape, these crosses were noticed that appeared as if they were made independently and placed during the construction process, this is clearly shown by the difference between the type and shape of the stones and seals. The importance of these seals is indeed the inauguration, sanctification, and consecration of the place. It is not merely a decorative work, but it has an important ritual function, it may have been anointed with the holy chrism.



Figure (19) consecration seal to Abba Bshia at red Monastery, in Sohag, Egypt.

8.1.8.3. A seal of consecration with tempera

- **Shape:** oval seal
- **Type:** Religious seal, fig. (20)
- **Dimensions:** 3.90" in diameter
- **Material:** Tempera on plaster
- **History:** There is no clear date, but it dates back to the 6/7 centuries AD.
- **Location:** inside the south lobe of the trilobed sanctuary, church of St. Shenute, the White Monastery in Sohag.
- **Publication:** it is published for the first time
- **The description:** It is one of the most beautiful consecration seals. Two angels are carrying an oval shape with a wide inside frame, known as "the mandorla." One from the right and the other from the left, they were drawn as if they were flying in the sky. Above the left angel is a drawing of "the sun", next to which is the Virgin Mary, standing with her hands raised in a prayer position and above the right angel is a drawing of "the moon", next to which is "John the Apostle" standing with his hands raised in a prayer position. The "Mandorla" from inside, there is a Coptic triumphal cross of equal ends in it [55]. At the point of convergence of the ends of the cross, a small circle was drawn, inside which was a four-petal rose, and in each of the corners of the cross, a small pointed leaf emerged, the surface of the main large cross is decorated with floral motifs and small circles with crosses inside. On both sides of the cross, a scarlet scarf (sash) hangs down. It is indicating the garment of Jesus Christ or the victory over death. So, the purpose of the seal is to sanctify the church and dedicate it to.



Figure (20) consecration seal inside the south lobe of the trilobed sanctuary, church of St. Shenute the White Monastery in Sohag, Egypt.

8.1.9. Consecration seal at the British Museum

- **Shape:** circular seal.
- **Type:** Religious Seal, fig. (21)
- **Dimensions:** 0.25 cm in diameter
- **Material and artistic method:** Carved on limestone and painted with red ink.
- **History:** There is no clear date, but it dates back to the eighth and ninth centuries AD.
- **Location:** It was discovered in the excavations of Wadi Sarga in Assuit in 1913/1914 AD under the supervision of Campbell Thompson and F.A. Richards [56].
- **Conservation place:** The British Museum, London, No. EA1924
- **Publication:** Cited in Monastic Communities Areas in Assiut Governorate by Samuel [33].
- **The description:** A circular consecration seal with a wide frame decorated with cross grooves. Inside it is a Coptic cross, the edges of which do not reach the edge of the circle from the inside. The entire surface of the Cross is decorated with cross grooves like those on the seal frame, it was written on both sides of the cross “the letter of Alpha and Omega”, which indicates that God is the beginning and the end. The seal is carried on a base drawn below, resembling a lectern, which clearly shows the importance of this symbol in relation to the church ritual and the importance of the seals of consecration. Written in Coptic to the left of the seal is the word Andrew “ΑΝΔΡΕΩC”. The name of a saint is mentioned next to the seal, confirming that the church or altar was named after Andrew, fig. (21-a). An elegant group of consecration seals or inauguration crosses dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries AD was found in the ancient church in the Monastery of St. Anthony, fig. (21-b), It is similar to the aforementioned seal of consecration, which indicates that the seals of consecration are applied to the walls of churches and monasteries, It was found in all layers of plaster and dates back to different periods of time, which indicates that it was made in every architectural renovation that occurred in the church, it was tantamount to the inauguration of the church even after its renovation, it is a ritual that is still followed to this day. It seems that the bishop or the patriarch used to anoint it with chrism oil after drawing or engraving it during the inauguration prayer [57]. On both sides of the consecration seal, the letters Alpha and Omega were often written, which is a symbol of God the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. The seals of consecration were often engraved on the pillars of the church and on every wall of the church and

carried out by drawing or engraving. A consecration seal, classified as one of the most beautiful consecration seals, was found in one of the old Christian houses in Taha in Minia, fig. (21-c), in the middle of the upper lintel of the entrance. This is evidence that the idea of consecrating and blessing the architecture also moved to Coptic civil architecture. It dates back to the 17th century AD. In the monastery of Abba Fan in Malawi in Minia, fig. (21-d), on one of the walls of the ancient church, a drawing of a seal of consecration was found resembling a (Sacrifice), which drawn in green, dates to the 18th century AD. As is clear, seals were found in many layers of plaster that date back to different periods of time. The seal here is a circle of an olive branch with an equilateral cross inside, each end of it shapes a pointed leaf, with a small circle in each of its corners. The seals of consecration were not only found in churches, monasteries, and caves, they were also found on the facades of the forts of monasteries, which is a strong and clear example of the function and importance of the seals of consecration in Coptic architecture. It was found on the facade of the monastery of Al-Muharraq fort in Assiut, fig. (21-e), dates back to the 18th century AD.

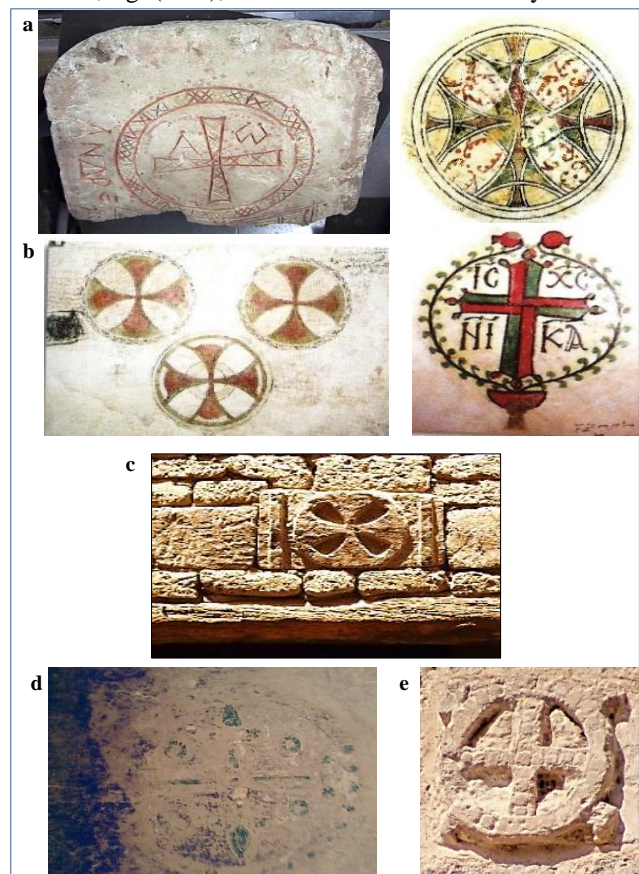


Figure (21) **a.** cornice has a consecration seal preserved at British Museum, in London, No. EA1924, (After: Abraham, 2015). **b.** consecration seal at monastery of St. Anthony, (After: *The monastery monks congregation, 2003*). **c.** consecration seal at old Christian houses in Taha, Minia, (After: Samuel, 2012). **d.** consecration seal at the monastery of Abba Fan in Malawi El Minia, (After: Samuel, 2012). **e.** consecration seal on face of fort at Monastery of Al-Muharraq in Assiut in Egypt, (After: Samuel, 2015).

9. Conclusion

Coptic consecration seals are featured in art and architecture. It had a religious (ritual) role, and an artistic "decorative" role, symbolizing the Holy Communion, which refers to the Lord Christ. It was drawn in a circular shape with a cross of equal ends in the middle, or a circle with a portrait of Christ inside it. The purpose of this was to declare that this place or artifact, on which the seal of consecration was drawn or engraved, is dedicated to God. It may only be used in worship and religious rituals. Likewise, this seal in Coptic art is a symbol confirming the devotion of this place to God's service and worship. Consecration seals varied; so, it became what is made of it in the name of God. Including what is made in the name of a saint. As for the placement of those seals, it differed according to the method in which they were carrying them out, and the date of its manufacture. The seals of consecration executed by painting were placed randomly on the walls. As for the consecration seals, which were carried out by relief on the stone, they were placed in an important and clear part of the building, often on the front facade of the building. The stone dedication seals from the first centuries until the twelfth century AD were clear and accurate. It has symbolism that refers to the cross or Christ. Finally, the consecration seal expresses the function and the owner, which is known as "Rank", the Islamic ranks that appeared on the facades of buildings, masterpieces, and applied arts are only a normal extension of the consecration seal.

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