COPTIC TEXTILE DESIGNS

M. Gerspach



144 Egyptian Designs
from the Early Christian Era

(This book is collected by Kazi Md. Yakub,
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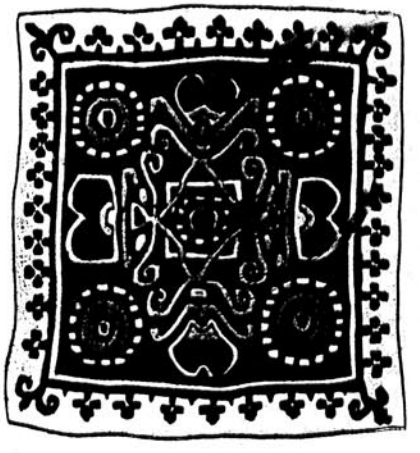


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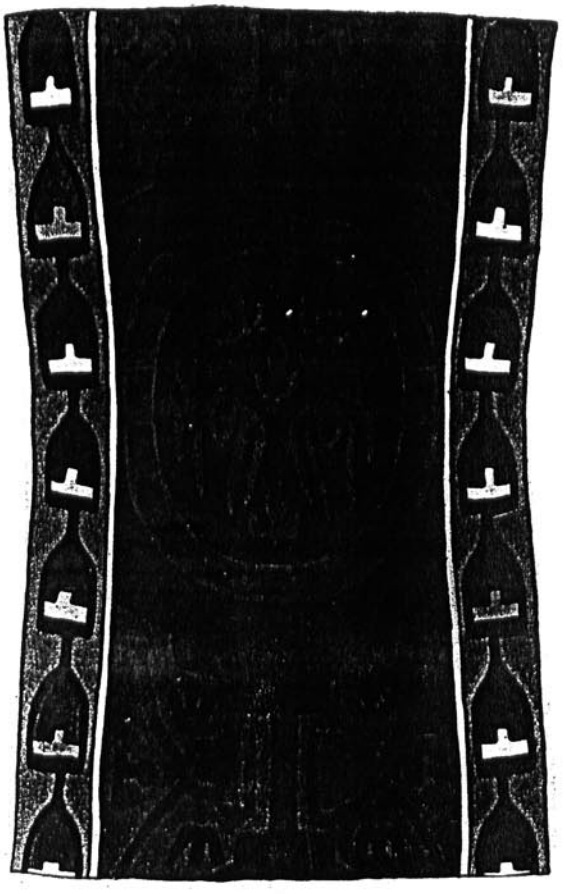


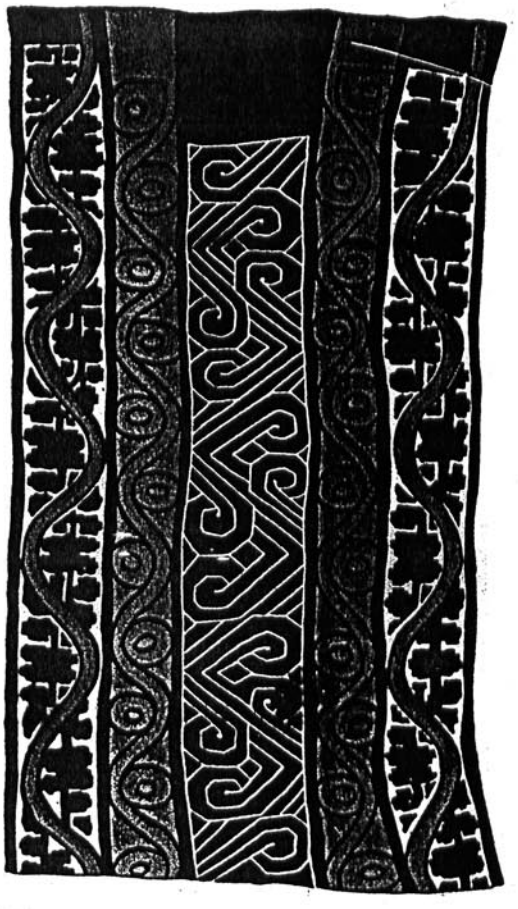














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Publisher's Note

The Copts are the native Christians of Egypt. Coptic art is the term generally used to designate art produced in Egypt in the early Christian era, that is, during the last centuries of the ancient world. At that time Egypt was a major province of the Roman Empire, with numerous Greeks in its urban centers. (It was not until the Arab conquest about 640 A.D. that Egypt became part of the Islamic world.)

Older books ascribe Coptic art (which includes important architecture, painting, sculpture and metalwork in addition to textiles) almost exclusively to that part of the population of more purely Egyptian stock; these were also the more fervent Christians. More recently, scholars have emphasized the cosmopolitan character within this cultural area, and have suggested a major role played by resident Greeks, who would have produced the more pagan and the more classical objects. This controversy is not likely to be settled in the near future.

What is clear, at any rate, is that the Egyptian textiles of the early centuries A.D., known as Coptic, are among the great heritages from antiquity and one of the finest groups of textiles in the history of art. Found by archeologists in great numbers—the industry was state-controlled and there was an enthusiastic Empire-wide market—these textiles include (often only in fragments) wall hangings, blankets and other larger pieces, but are for the most part trimmings that were applied to costly garments. Both lay and clerical robes in the late Roman period were basically of plain unpatterned cloth but were adorned with highly decorative vertical bands, squares, ovals and circles sewn onto certain areas (shoulders, sleeves, etc.). All the designs in the present volume are based on such garment trimmings, most of them from clothing found on bodies in burials discovered in Egypt in 1884 by the great French archeologist Gaston Maspero. (M. Gerspach, who selected the designs for the original edition, about 1890, was director of the Gobelins, the French national tapestry works.)

Designs on pages 1-23 were executed in tapestry weave with a woof of purplish brown wool on a warp of pale yellow linen. The other designs are polychrome, with mainly flat colors including various shades of red, blue, yellow, green and beige. Both Christian motifs (Christ, celebrants, etc.) and Greco-Roman motifs (nature, erotes, heroes, etc.) are in evidence. Plant and animal motifs are most common, ranging from quite naturalistic to quite abstract. The abstract and geometrical elements display a luxuriant imagination, especially in the rich borders of frets, loops and interlaces. With their mingling of cultural elements (classical, Near Eastern and at times strongly Byzantine), these art works not only exemplify the multiplicity of late ancient times, but also presage many developments in European medieval art (heraldry, chivalric motifs, scrolls of foliage, animal symbolism and much more).

The designs in this book are admirably suited to adaptation by artists and craftspeople. Clothing and accessories of leather or metal may be enhanced by these evocative patterns. In addition, designers and commercial artists may find here a ready-made source of out-of-the-ordinary yet powerful imagery for graphics, advertising, packaging, textiles, wallcovering and other applications.

