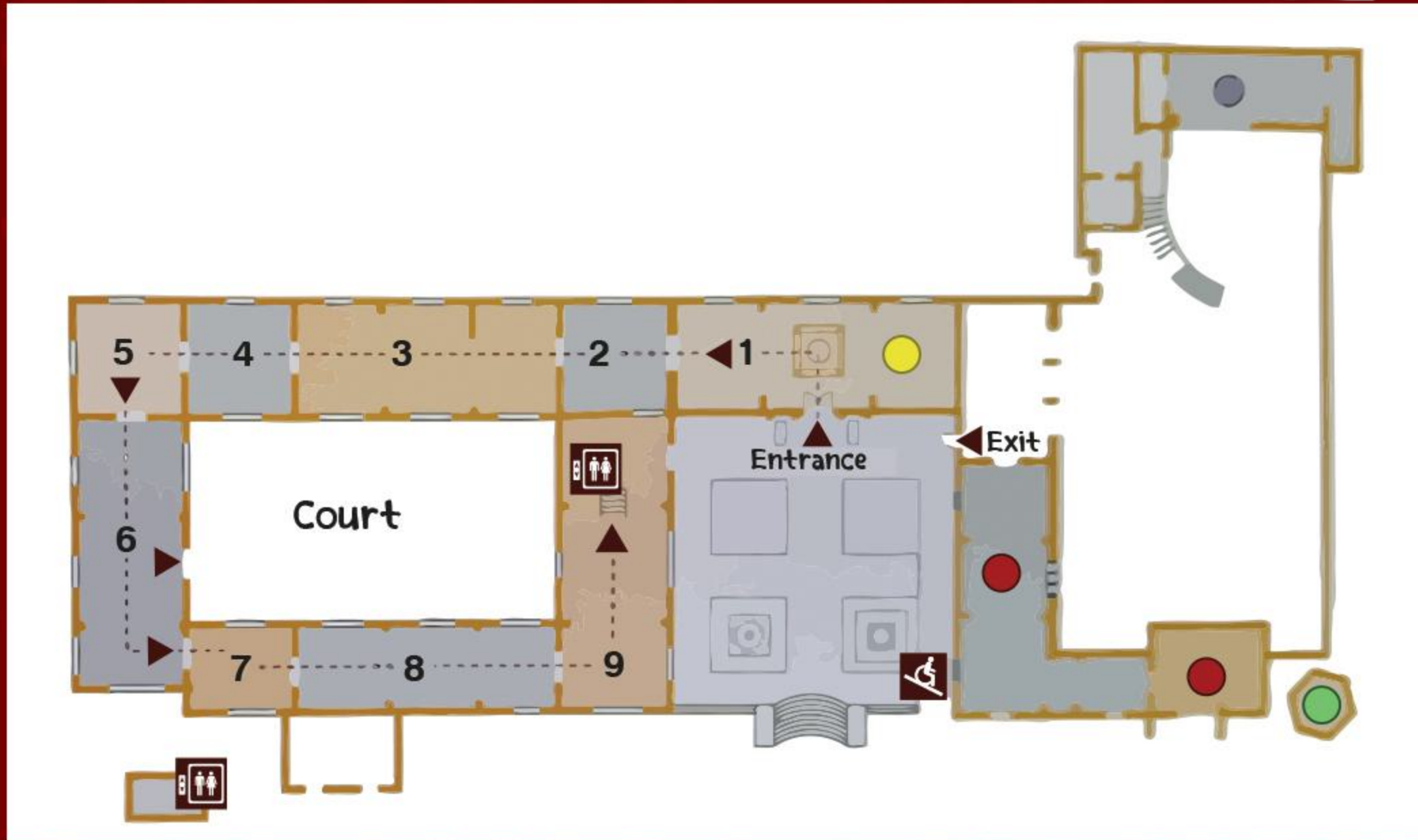


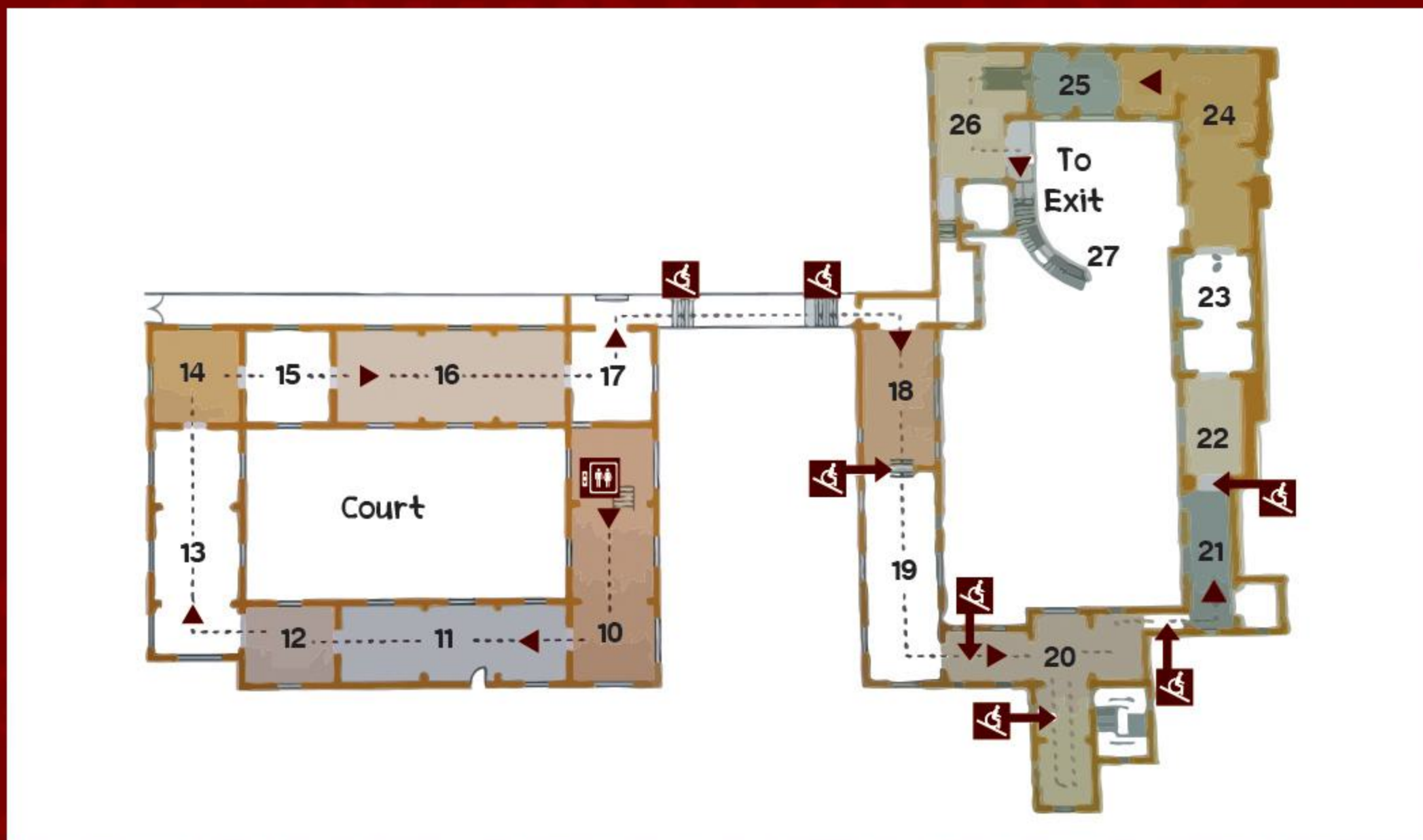
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Apse from the monastery of St. Apollo, Bawit, Assiut, 6<sup>th</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> century AD.

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Government District,  
 New Administrative Capital, Cairo, Egypt



# The COPTIC Museum

ΠΙΜΑΝΧΑΜΗΝΙ ΝΡΕΜΝΗΧΗΜΙ



## ABOUT THE MUSEUM:

It was the French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero who forwarded the idea of gathering and preserving historical Coptic objects. He collected several Coptic artworks from different places in Egypt and housed them in one of the Egyptian Museum's halls. The hall remained in use until Marcus Simaika Pasha established the Coptic Museum in 1910, making it the first museum dedicated to Christian art and antiquities in Egypt.



Marcus Simaika began collecting Coptic objects housed in the Egyptian Museum as well as architectural elements from old churches, especially those that were undergoing renovation and restoration at that time. Among these churches were the churches of Old Cairo. He used them to build up the collection at the Coptic Museum. The museum was established within the walls of the Roman fort known as the Fortress of Babylon in Old Cairo. It was inaugurated in 1910, during the reign of Abbas Helmi II (1892-1914 AD) and contained the largest collection of Coptic antiquities in the world. The Coptic Museum's importance is related to its unique position, as it is nestled between the most famous churches in Egypt, including the Hanging Church and St. Sergius and Bacchus (Abu Serga) Church, which includes the cave that the Holy Family sought refuge in when they escaped to Egypt. In the area, there is also the Jewish Synagogue of Ben Ezra and the mosque of Amr Ibn al-'As, the oldest surviving mosque in Egypt and North Africa. Therefore, the area has been called the "Religions Complex".



A stained-glass window of the museum, adorned with Coptic decorations such as the cross, the peacock and bunches of grapes.

## MUSEUM DESIGN:

The museum consists of two wings. The old one was built in 1910, while the newer wing was inaugurated in 1947. During the renovation process in 2006, both sections were connected with a corridor that is now also used as an exhibition gallery, displaying several wall paintings from the hermitages of Qalali. The museum was also accessible for special needs and has been equipped with escalators and elevators. Combined, both wings include 27 halls housing a large collection of diverse antiquities, including stone artworks, mural paintings, metal objects, wooden crafts, textiles, icons, and unique manuscripts. The museum's façade was modelled after the façade of al-Aqmar mosque, with the addition of some Christian symbols.

## ARTISTIC INFLUENCES:

Art and civilisation are influenced by history and people draw their creativity and innovation from their predecessors. Coptic art was influenced by a number of art forms in fundamental ways. Many of its themes and decorative elements were inspired by Ancient Egyptian, Persian and Graeco-Roman art, or are influenced by contemporary styles, such as those found in Byzantine and Islamic art. Coptic art in Egypt began to flourish around the sixth century A.D.



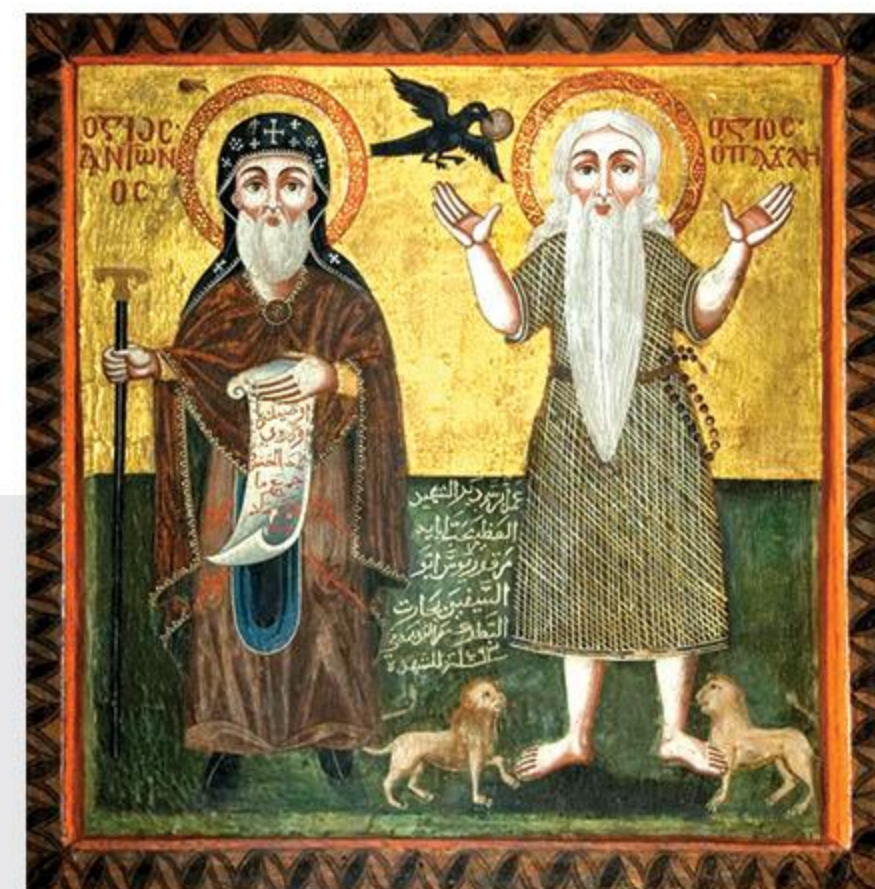
Part of a broken niche shows Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty and music, limestone, 3rd/4th century AD.

## ICONS AND

## WALL PAINTINGS:

Icon art was one of the most important and widespread Coptic art forms. The word 'icon' comes from the Greek Eikon, meaning 'image.' The term was used to describe wooden coloured portraits depicting saints or religious themes. They were hung on the walls or on wooden screens of churches and monasteries. Sometimes each icon was inscribed with the name of its artist and the year in which it was painted. The date was written in Arabic, Coptic, or in both languages.

Icons were made by painting the image or scene on a wooden plaque and then covering it with a cloth of linen to provide rough surface. Then a layer of gypsum was added to the cloth as well as the layer of paint. Natural oxides were used for the paint in Tempera technique, along with egg yolk, vinegar, and water. The wooden portrait was prepared for painting by adding several layers of gypsum.



Icon with the visit of St. Antony to St. Paul of Thebes, the first hermit, Monastery of Mercurius (Abu Sayfayn), Old Cairo, 1777 AD.



Mural fragment depicts Adam and Eve in Paradise before and after their fall from grace, Um El-Buregat, Fayoum, 11th century AD.

## TEXTILES

The textile industry witnessed a significant flourishing; due to the skill of Coptic weavers in shaping and using dyes in making textile. This type of Coptic Textile was known as "qabati". The Coptic museum preserves distinguished examples of Coptic textiles in the world.



A curtain, coptic textile depicts a Nubian figure playing the flute, linen and wool 4th/5th century AD.

## MANUSCRIPTS:

Monasteries in the past were houses of knowledge. They included large libraries that housed book and manuscript collections. Skilled scribes lived as monks in the monastery, and they composed religious and liturgical texts that were kept in the library. One of the most famous manuscripts kept in the museum is the Naga Hammadi Manuscript and the book of Psalms. In addition, there are many pieces of papyri, animal bones, pottery sherds, wood, and parchment. There are also writing tools with their leather bags and small metal vessels for ink.



Two pages from codex II: Nag Hammadi library, papyrus, Jabal al-Tarif, 4th century AD.

## SCULPTURE:

The Coptic sculptors excelled at carving stones and ornamenting them. This art form was found in ancient Egypt and survived until Christianity spread in Egypt. Copts constructed churches and monasteries out of different kinds of stone, modelling them after ancient Egyptian temples. Artistic motifs represented religious themes from Old Testament (Torah) and New Testament (Bible), as well as scenes from daily life in addition to depicting life on the Nile. It is worth mentioning that Coptic decoration emphasized the importance of the Nile River; this is reflected by the carvings of fish, crocodiles, and hippopotami in addition to aquatic plants.



Nilos (the god of the Nile), relief, limestone, 3rd/4th century AD.