



Coptic Culture: Past, Present and Future

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In May 2008, the Coptic Orthodox Centre in Stevenage, UK organised a conference on Coptic Culture: Past, Present, and Future. The conference aimed to highlight the contributions and achievements of one of the most obscure periods of Egyptian history: the Coptic Period. The importance of this period lies in its valuable contributions to some of the most formative theological debates of Christianity. Strictly defined as a Late Antique culture, spanning only the third to the seventh centuries AD, the heritage of the Coptic Period still survives today in the artistic expression, liturgical services, and heritage of millions of Egyptian Christians who live in Egypt and abroad. This period's lasting contributions, however, remain underappreciated and many of its aspects remain unclear or unknown to the general public. For the first time, the conference at the Coptic Centre brought together specialists working on all aspects of Coptic culture, from its earliest phases to the present day. One of the aims of the conference was to highlight new research on Coptic art, writings, and archaeology. By bringing together specialists, academics and Coptic clergy, the conference fostered an active discussion of what defined Coptic identity in centuries past and what it means to be Coptic in contemporary culture, both in Egypt and abroad. It is important that we draw on, understand, and appreciate the rich cultural heritage of this period as we look to our past to inform our present and define our future. The conference drew scholars from Australia, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Their papers were organised along 5 general thematic blocks that dealt with (1) The Egyptian roots of Coptic culture; (2) How do we know what we know: Archaeological Sites and Museum Collections; (3) Aspects of Early and Medieval Coptic Culture: Case Studies; (4) Current Trends in Coptic Studies; and (5) Coptic Culture Today and where it's heading. This volume contains their contributions.

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