

# THE *CYNOCEPHALUS* ICONOGRAPHY IN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AND COPTIC ARTS

By

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## ABSTRACT

[AR] تصوير كائنات مستكلبة الرأس في الفن المصري القديم والقبطي يتناول هذا البحث دراسة الكائنات المتمثلة في الفن برأس الكلبيات وجسم الإنسان، ويتبع أهمية تصويرهم في الفن المصري القديم والفن القبطي. وقد عرفت الديانة المصرية القديمة هذا النوع من التمثيل حيث أنها منحت مكانة عالية للحيوانات عامةً، إيماناً بأن الإله الخالق قد خلق جميع المخلوقات دون تسلسل هرمي، مهدت هذه الفكرة لتبجيل الحيوانات وقبول الشكل الحيواني والهجين للألوهة. وترجع أهمية تمثيل مخلوقات بهذا الشكل لأهمية الكلبيات وارتباطها بفكرة الموت والبعث. وتنقسم هذه الورقة البحثية إلى جزئين يتبع كل منهما الطريقة الوصفية التحليلية لتوضيح دور المخلوقات المستكلبة الرأس وتمثيلها في الفن المصري القديم والفن القبطي. ويتمثل الهدف الرئيسي لهذا البحث في تتبع استمرارية تصوير المخلوقات الكلبية ودراسة اختلاف دلالاتها على مر العصور. علماً بأن هذا التمثيل غير شائع في الفن القبطي، خاصة عند تمثيل القديسين حيث إن رمزية الكلبيات مرتبطة بالشر والشيطان والفساد والخراب في العقيدة المسيحية. وبالرغم من ذلك، استلهم الفن القبطي كثير من الأفكار من التراث المصري القديم واستمر تمثيل المخلوقات المستكلبة الرأس لما يقرب من ثلاثة عشر قرن حتى مع تحريم المعتقدات الدينية للمصري القديم.

[EN] The aim of the paper is to investigate the significance of *cynocephalus* iconography, which is the depiction of creatures with a canid's head and a human's body. The iconography initially emerged in Ancient Egyptian religion, which bestowed a high rank to their animals and instilled the belief that the creator deity created all the beings without hierarchy. This idea paved the way for the reverence of the animals and the acceptance of the hybrid and zoomorphic form of the deities. The *cynocephali* form's significance depends on the canines' importance and the connection with the sacred idea of death and resurrection in Ancient Egypt. The paper consists of two parts. The first part adopts the descriptive, analytical method to illustrate the *cynocephali* and their representations over the Ancient Egyptian and the Coptic eras. The paper also aims to follow the continuity of *cynocephali* iconography and to study the controversy of its significance in different epochs. The representation was uncommon in Coptic art, especially when representing saints, because of the evil, humble, and corruptive symbolism of canines in Christian dogma. However, this pictographic representation lasted for almost thirteen centuries in Coptic art because of the influence of Ancient Egyptian iconography and because Ancient Egyptian art was considered one of the most inspirational sources for Christian artists, even while Ancient Egyptian beliefs were prohibited.

**KEYWORDS:** Ancient Egyptian art, Canines, Cannibals, Coptic art, *Cynocephalus*, Death deities, Dog-headed creatures, Hybrid representation, Saints, Resurrection.

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *cynocephalus* refers to a creature with a canid's head and a human body<sup>1</sup>. It is derived from Latin, and originates with the Greek word «Κέφαλος» which means dog-headed<sup>2</sup>. The term canid refers to carnivore animals belonging to the canidae family, including wolves, jackals, foxes, coyotes, dingoes, and wild and domestic dogs. The origin of the canines is a matter of dispute because all the Old World canines had the same number of chromosomes. However, it is believed that the wolf is the predecessor of all canids<sup>3</sup>.

Before discussing the importance of canines in the Ancient Egyptian environment, it should be noted that animals were highly respected throughout Ancient Egyptian history. Ancient Egyptians used to identify the different characteristics of these animals to incorporate them in daily life and religion. The importance of animals in Ancient Egypt is clear from the representation of the creation myths on temples since early periods of Egyptian history. God created all creatures as equals. The Ancient Egyptians did not differentiate among the living creatures as they were all created from the creator deity's body, mind, and word. The equality between animals and humans denoted the importance of the animals, as some Ancient Egyptian deities were identified with distinguished animals<sup>4</sup>. Gods were linked to specific animals according to the nature of the animals and the deity's identity. They depicted them with anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, or even hybrid iconography. Hybridism is when animal and human actions and features are combined to embody divine characteristics and powers, creating the diverse nature of the Ancient Egyptian religion<sup>5</sup>.

The researcher found different kinds of canines that were part of the daily and religious life of the Ancient Egyptians, such as dogs, jackals, hyenas, and foxes<sup>6</sup>. Although some canines, such as dogs, were considered essential faithful pets, protectors of their masters, and partners in hunting and working, other canines, including hyenas and foxes, were less important and considered to be frightening beasts<sup>7</sup>. Jackals and dogs were closer to religious life more than the other species of canines<sup>8</sup>.

The Ancient Egyptian religious significance of canines, which lasted from Egypt's early history until the late Greco-Roman era, was due to their association with the afterlife and resurrection. Canine deities were likely associated with death since the Predynastic period due to their role in the exhumation of the tombs. The identity of the animal represented in the Egyptian art for canine funerary deities is debated, with some attributing them for a wild dog or a golden jackal. This confusion arises because both were

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<sup>1</sup> THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY 1933: 1304.

<sup>2</sup> LIDDELL & SCOTT 1996: 1011.

<sup>3</sup> DAVIS 1987: 131-132.


<sup>4</sup> DUNAD & LICHTENBERG 2005: 17.

<sup>5</sup> WILKINSON 2003: 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> HOULIHAN 2001: 229-231.

<sup>7</sup> OSBORN & OSBORNOVÁ 1998: 55; HOULIHAN 2001: 229-231; IKRAM 2001: 134.

<sup>8</sup> WILFONG 2015: 12.

sometimes referred to by the same word  s3b , which encompassed various types<sup>9</sup>. Although the Ancient Egyptians could differentiate among canid species, they preferred to choose a hybrid form of some of their canines to represent these funerary deities. The false idea that these canine deities were wolves came from Hellenic literature. However, wolves were not found in Ancient Egypt<sup>10</sup>.

The Ancient Egyptian era left behind tremendously rich iconography that lasted until the Coptic era<sup>11</sup>. The Copts were familiar with the places depicting different animals from Ancient Egypt. They embraced their new religion in Ancient temples, which they changed into churches or cells for monks. They also observed different aspects of animals and their significance in Greco-Roman culture. However, they chose only some of these animals and gave them different meanings from their counterparts in Ancient Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Roman civilizations<sup>12</sup>.

Canines and their symbolism in Coptic art differed from their significance in Ancient Egyptian art. The species depicted in Coptic art were dogs, wolves, and jackals. Generally, canines were related to malignant evil traits. However, there were some exceptions with some species. The significance of each animal was determined according to verses from the Bible.

Firstly, the wolf was considered to be the origin of all canines. It was also a symbol of evil powers, deception, and wiliness. Savage wolves were mentioned in the Bible<sup>13</sup>, and were likened to the devil that scattered the believers. Christ told his disciples that he would send them as lambs among the wolves, referring to the obstacles that they would face<sup>14</sup>. The jackal was also a symbol of destruction in the prophecy of Isaiah<sup>15</sup> against Babylon and associated with weeping and wailing<sup>16</sup>. Meanwhile, foxes were among the canines related to sin and deception<sup>17</sup>. They were symbols of corruption in the Holy Book: «*Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom*»<sup>18</sup>.

However, the dog could be a virtuous symbol, embodying watchfulness and loyalty, as mentioned in the story of Tobias. In this story, a dog was following Tobias like a well-faithful companion. The dog was considered a good messenger, since it announced Tobias's arrival to his family<sup>19</sup>. The dog's subordination to Tobias symbolized the salvation of Christ to Jews and Gentiles who were likened to dogs. Dogs were also a symbol of matrimonial loyalty, so they were sometimes depicted being carried by married women or

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<sup>9</sup> WILFONG 2015: 9-13.

<sup>10</sup> HOULIHAN 2001: 229-231.

<sup>11</sup> GABRA & EATON-KRAUSS 2007: 41-42.

<sup>12</sup> EVANS 2012: 63.

<sup>13</sup> *Acts* 20: 29; *Mt.*10:16, *Lk.* 10:3.

<sup>14</sup> COOPER 2012: 513.

<sup>15</sup> *Is.* 13:22.

<sup>16</sup> *Mic.* 1:8.

<sup>17</sup> FERGESON 1961: 18.

<sup>18</sup> *Song.* 12:15.

<sup>19</sup> *Tob.*6:1-2; 11:9.

at their feet<sup>20</sup>. Dogs symbolized the triumph of virtue over evilness and represented monks who were characterized by sincerity in following the right faith<sup>21</sup>. Nonetheless, they were symbols of humility in the Bible when David asked King Saul about the reason for chasing him: «Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?»<sup>22</sup>. Dogs might also symbolize evil powers: «Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet»<sup>23</sup>. «Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs»<sup>24</sup>. Dogs were symbols of obsequiousness: «Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs»<sup>25</sup> and signified social marginalization: «It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs»<sup>26</sup>. One of the verses compares those who repeat their faults to dogs: «As a dog return to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly»<sup>27</sup>. They were considered among the scavengers<sup>28</sup>.

According to the previously mentioned significance of the canines, the author chose the *cynocephalus* iconography, which is a combination of the canid head and the human body. This decision was made because it is among the unique iconographies that lasted from pharaonic Egypt to the Coptic period, despite the difference in the religious significance of the canine species and the vast change of iconography. The paper adopts the descriptive analytical method to highlight the continuity of the *cynocephalus* iconography from Ancient Egyptian to Coptic arts, its significance, and the deities or characters adopting this form.

## II. CYNOCEPHALI IN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN AND GRECO-ROMAN ARTS

### 1. Anubis

*Anubis* was the most important canine deity and was associated with death and burials before the rise of the cult of god *Osiris*<sup>29</sup>. The Greek name *Anubis* originated from *Inpw*<sup>30</sup>. There were many attempts to translate *Anubis*'s name; some suggestions connected his name to the word *npw* meaning «dog», but it might mean «royal child». Another suggestion relates to the verb *inp* in the Pyramid texts, i.e., «to decay» or «to lie down», which might refer to *Anubis* as the crouching one<sup>31</sup>.

*Anubis* was referred to as the son of the cow goddess *Hesat* or the cat goddess *Bastet*. However, Plutarch suggested that his birth was from a sexual relation between *Nephtys* and *Osiris*, while *Isis* was in charge of his upbringing; this would make him the half-

<sup>20</sup> FERGESON 1961: 15.

<sup>21</sup> EVANS 2012: 67-68; FADEL 2022: 289.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Sam. 24:14.

<sup>23</sup> Ps. 22:16.

<sup>24</sup> Ps. 22:20.

<sup>25</sup> Mt. 7:6.

<sup>26</sup> Mt. 15:26.

<sup>27</sup> Prov. 26:11.

<sup>28</sup> 2 Kgs 9:10, 9:36.

<sup>29</sup> WILKINSON 2003: 190.

<sup>30</sup> VAN VOSS 1987: 330-331.

<sup>31</sup> HELCK & WESTENDORF 1975a: 327-333; VAN VOSS 1987: 330-331; WILKINSON 2003: 190.

brother of *Horus*<sup>32</sup>. Another theory, based on the Demotic magical papyrus, was that *Anubis* was the son of *Isis-Sekhmet* and *Osiris*<sup>33</sup>. *Anupet* of *Cynopolis* was his female counterpart, and the serpent goddess *Kebehut* was referred to as his daughter who helped him in the purification of the deceased<sup>34</sup>.

The god *Anubis* was depicted in many forms, including the complete zoomorphic canid sitting on a shrine with extended legs and pointed ears to indicate his vigilance as a protector. He sometimes wore a collar or a ceremonial tie, or was shown with a *sekhem* scepter and/or a flail in his hands, which were the attributes of god *Osiris*. He was rarely depicted in complete anthropomorphic form but was mostly rendered as a *cynocephalus*<sup>35</sup>. Less common images of *Anubis* are the canid-headed snake, the canid-headed *b3* bird, or a *genie*<sup>36</sup>.

*Anubis* could be a wild dog, a jackal, or a hybrid animal of the two species. He had the long muzzle, round pupils, five-toed front feet and four-toed back feet, and the squab tail, all which were characteristic features of the jackal and other canines<sup>37</sup>. Black is an uncommon color for canines, so it might symbolize the afterlife and rejuvenation<sup>38</sup>. *Anubis* appears as a *cynocephalus* in many scenes showing his funerary roles, such as depicting him bending over the deceased's corpse while mummifying it or performing funerary rituals [FIGURE 1]<sup>39</sup>.



[FIGURE 1]: *Anubis* in *Cynocephali* form making funerary rituals over the deceased, Tomb of *Siptah* (KV 47), Valley of the Kings, the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty © Theban mapping project of the ARCE, <https://thebanmappingproject.com/images/15609jpg?site=5910>, accessed 01/09/2023)

*Anubis* was the one responsible for the protection of the necropolis, the preservation of the corpse, and making sure that the deceased gained a new spiritual body. He was usually depicted in the *cynocephali* form while performing the opening of the mouth ritual for the rebirth of the deceased [FIGURES 2-3]<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> WILFONG 2015: 34.

<sup>33</sup> HELCK & WESTENDORF 1975a: 327-333.

<sup>34</sup> DUQUESENE 2005: 382.

<sup>35</sup> DOXEY 2001: 97-98.

<sup>36</sup> 'ABDAL-SALĀM 2021: 83.

<sup>37</sup> WILKINSON 1992: 65.

<sup>38</sup> WILKINSON 2003: 190.

<sup>39</sup> HART 1986: 22.

<sup>40</sup> Inv. Nr<sup>o</sup>.EA 9901,3. The British Museum. DOXEY 2001: 97-98.



[FIGURE 2]: *Anubis* in hybrid form embracing the mummy of *Hunefer* during the ritual of Opening the mouth Papyrus of *Hunefer*, the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty © The British Museum, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA9901-5](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA9901-5), accessed on (11/11/2023)



[FIGURE 3]: *Anubis*, as a *cynocephalus*, bending over the mummy of the deceased lying over the bed, touches the deceased's heart with one hand and while the other holds an adze to perform the opening of the mouth ritual. Tomb of *Nakhtamon* (TT 335), Deir el-Medinah, the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The official site of the Osirisnet project for Egyptological publications, [https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/artisans/nakhtamon335/e\\_nakhtamon335\\_05.htm](https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/artisans/nakhtamon335/e_nakhtamon335_05.htm), accessed on (12/11/2023)

He was also the deity responsible for guiding the deceased to the court of the last judgment. He would ask the deceased questions that were used to assess if the deceased could pass to the afterlife. He would also weigh the deceased's heart in front of *Maat's* feather to ensure his fairness [FIGURE 4]<sup>41</sup>.



[FIGURE 4]: *Anubis* in *cynocephali* form accompanying the deceased to the judgment court, balancing his heart against the feather of *Maat*. Papyrus of *Hunefer*, the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The British Museum, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA9901-3](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA9901-3), accessed on (12/11/2023)

<sup>41</sup> Nr<sup>o</sup>. EA 9901,3. The British Museum. DOXEY 2001: 97-98; WILKINSON 2003: 189.



Anubis was depicted as a canid-headed human in temples, often carrying or bending over a circular disk. This disk, possibly a sieve to support a woman during childbirth, is more likely a lunar disk, symbolizing rebirth and representing Anubis's gift to the newborn [FIGURE 5]<sup>42</sup>.



[FIGURE 5]: *Anubis bending over a lunar disk; Temple of Hatshepsut in Dair al-Bahari, 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty.*  
WILFONG 2015: 27, FIG.33.

During the *Greco-Roman* period, *Anubis* was the son of *Isis* and *Serapis*<sup>43</sup>. The *cynocephalus* iconography of the god *Anubis* had continued into the *Greco-Roman* era, and his cult flourished during this period. His role as the chief embalmer [FIGURE 6] and as the protector of the necropolis, *Osiris*, and the deceased, continued [FIGURE 7]<sup>44</sup>. The cult of *Anubis* spread because of his connection with the goddess *Isis*. His images were added in the *mammisi* of the temples dating back to this period, and he was seen as a protector of the goddess during the birth of *Horus*. He was also depicted carrying a tambourine to amuse *Isis* and *Hathor* [FIGURE 8]<sup>45</sup>. Different attributes were added to the god *Anubis* during the *Greco-Roman* era because he had become a cosmic deity, ruler of the sky and earth. He was believed to have mysterious wisdom that allowed him to bring light to humans. *Anubis* already had a distinguished role in Egyptian magic, and his magical role increased during this period. His images were added on amulets and magical gems that were used for protection and the promotion of good fortune. *Anubis's* role also appears in Demotic and Greek magical papyri as a god of prophecy and a mediator between two worlds. The god *Hermes* was the messenger of the Hellenistic deities and a guide for the deceased to the afterlife. Thus, he was merged with *Anubis* and was given the name *Anubis-Hermes* or *Hermes-Anubis*, embodying the attributes of both gods<sup>46</sup>.

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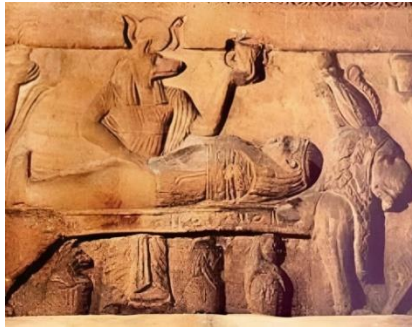
<sup>42</sup> RITER 1985: 150-152; WINAND & et Al. 2016: 130.

<sup>43</sup> WILKINSON 2003: 190.

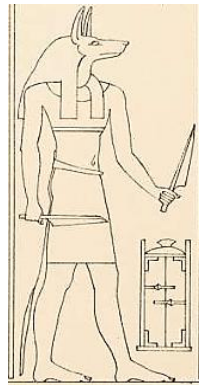
<sup>44</sup> WILFONG 2015: 68.

<sup>45</sup> WILKINSON 2003: 189.

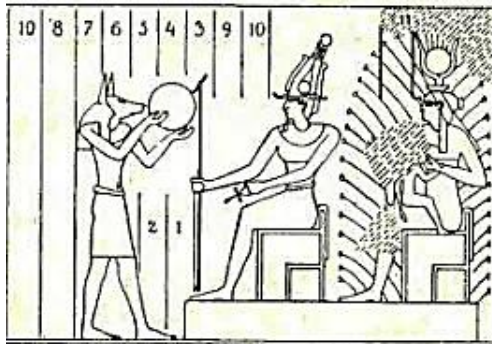
<sup>46</sup> SIMPSON 2003: 92. STEFANOVIĆ 2004: 271-272.



[FIGURE 6]: Anubis as a cynocephalus embalming the body of Osiris. Cemetery of Kom al-Shuqafa, 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. GUIMIER-SORBETS & EL-DIN 2017: 108.



[FIGURE 7]: Anubis in a hybrid form holding knives to protect Osiris; Dendera Temple. Ptolemaic period. CHRISTINA 2017: 51, FIG.50.



[FIGURE 8]: Anubis striking the tambourine to amuse Hathor/ Isis and her son. The *mammisi* of Edfu Temple, Ptolemaic period. CHASSINAT 1939: 18, PL.XIII.

He was sometimes depicted in a *cynocephali* form, dressed in military attire [FIGURE 9] or in Hellenic costumes [FIGURE 10]<sup>47</sup> while holding the attributes of *Hermes*, such as the caduceus as a symbol of the communication between the underworld, earth, sky, and the palm branch. The palm branch was a symbol of victory for the Greeks and the Romans, while for the Ancient Egyptians, it was a symbol of eternity. Thus, it was fitting for *Anubis* to hold it as a symbol of victory over death<sup>48</sup>. Some scholars believe that the *cynocephalus* form of *Anubis*, with the attributes of *Hermes*, is *Hermanubis* while others think that the

<sup>47</sup> Nr<sup>o</sup>. EA 36064. The British Museum.

<sup>48</sup> MALAISE 2014: 73-78.



complete anthropomorphic form of the deity with a dog at his feet is *Hermanubis*<sup>49</sup>. The name *Hermanubis* does not appear in any representations, but the name is mentioned in some Hellenic sources during Roman Egypt<sup>50</sup>. It seems that *Hermanubis* was only one of the many manifestations of Alexandrian and Roman *Anubis*<sup>51</sup>.



[FIGURE 9]: *Anubis* in a hybrid form wearing military costumes. Cemetery of Kom al-Shuqafa, the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. MEROÑO & GALLARDO 2021: 192, FIG.2.



[FIGURE 10]: Statue of *Anubis* as a *cynocephalus* wearing a Greek tunic, holding a palm branch, and a broken caduceus, which are the attributes of *Hermes* © The British Museum; Roman Period, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA36064](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA36064), accessed on (12/11/2023).

<sup>49</sup> Nr.25785. The Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria. Statue of a deity from al-Ras al-soda temple. The deity was depicted in a complete anthropomorphic form, wearing the *calathus* above his head and himation. He was holding a palm branch in one hand, while in the other, he was holding a caduceus, which is now lost. A small dog was represented beside his feet. Some scholars suggested that the statue was a manifestation of the god *Hermanubis*. SAVVOPOULOS & BIANCHI 2012: 166-167.

<sup>50</sup> MALAISE 2014, 73.

<sup>51</sup> STEFANOVIĆ 2004: 273.

## 2. *Wepwawet*

*Wepwawet* was a canine deity whose name means «Opener of the Ways»<sup>52</sup>. He used to be worshiped in Abydos as the son of *Osiris*. However, he was sometimes considered to be the son of *Isis* and *Shu*<sup>53</sup>. *Wepwawet* had secular and funerary roles as an opener of the body or the womb. He guided the king during wars, facilitated the ascension to the throne, lead ritual processions before the all of the gods and the king, and opened the deceased's eyes and mouth in «Opening the Mouth ceremony». He also guided the deceased in the netherworld, and marked the path for the sun's rise every morning<sup>54</sup>.

*Wepwawet* was among the canine deities whose sacred animal was like *Anubis*, which might be a dog or a jackal. He was frequently depicted in canid form but was occasionally depicted in the *cynocephali* form with the head of a canid and a human body [FIGURE 11]<sup>55</sup>.



[FIGURE 11]: The third register of the stela depicts King Wepwawetemsaf in front of Wepwawet in his form. The British Museum, the Second Intermediate Period. The British Museum; [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA969](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA969), accessed on (12/11/2023).

*Wepwawet*'s cult continued during the Greco-Roman era; a large number of mummies from this period were dedicated to him. They were sometimes identified as dogs or jackals<sup>56</sup>. The confusion surrounding his sacred animal dates to this era as he was the local deity of the thirteenth Nome of Upper Egypt, *Lycopolis* (The Town of Wolf), now known as Asyut. He continued to be depicted as a *cynocephalus* in this era, especially in scenes accompanying *Anubis*; they could not be distinguished from each other except through their names [FIGURE 12]<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> DUQUESENE 2005: 390.

<sup>53</sup> HOUSER-WEGNER 2001: 496-497; WILKINSON 2003: 191-192.

<sup>54</sup> WILKINSON 2003: 191-192; WEGNER 2007: 140-141.

<sup>55</sup> Nr<sup>o</sup>. EA 969. The British Museum. WILKINSON 2003: 191-192.

<sup>56</sup> WEGNER 2007: 140-141.

<sup>57</sup> Nr<sup>o</sup>.EA 8468. The British Museum. HOUSER-WEGNER 2001: 496-497.



[FIGURE 12]: The third register of the stela depicts the donor in front of some deities, including *Wepwawet*. On the left side, he is preceded by *Anubis*; they are both depicted as *cynocephali*. *Stela of Neswy*, Ptolemaic Period. The British Museum; [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA8468](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA8468), accessed on (12/11/2023).

### 3. *Duamutef*

*Duamutef* was among the canine deities whose name means «He who adores his mother». He was one of the four sons of *Horus* who has been attested since the Old Kingdom until the Greco-Roman era. The four sons of *Horus* were responsible for the protection of the canopic jars and the internal organs kept inside them<sup>58</sup>. *Imesty*, with the human head, was responsible for the liver, *Hapy*, shown with a baboon head, is protector of the lungs, *Duamutef* was the jackal headed being responsible for the stomach, and *Kebehsenuf*, shown with a falcon head, protected the intestines. Sometimes, the responsibilities of *Hapy* and *Duamutef* were switched<sup>59</sup>. They were also responsible for helping the deceased to reach the sky and protect the cardinal directions. *Duamutef* protected the east<sup>60</sup>.

*Duamutef* was mostly depicted with the canine head, and served as a lid for the Canopic jars. However, he was sometimes depicted in the *cynocephali* form with the canine head and human body<sup>61</sup>. He was mostly represented standing with the three other sons of *Horus* [FIGURE 13]. *Anubis* sometimes appeared with them, as he was the deity responsible for the protection of the canopic chest that held the canopic jars<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> WILFONG 2015: 22.

<sup>59</sup> DODSON 2001: 561-563.

<sup>60</sup> WILFONG 2015: 20.

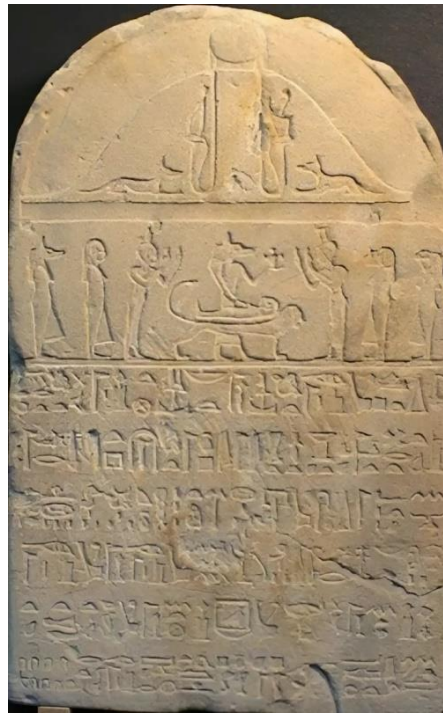
<sup>61</sup> WILKINSON 2003: 88-89.

<sup>62</sup> Inv. Nr<sup>o</sup>. JE18651. The Egyptian Museum in Cairo. WILFONG 2015: 20.



[FIGURE 13]: *Hor-Nakht adores Rehorakhty and the four sons of Horus, among them Duamutef in the cynocephali form. Stela of Hor-Nakht, Thebes, 25<sup>th</sup> dynasty. ABDELMAGUID 2015: 77, PL.1.*

The importance of *Duamutef* continued into the Greco-Roman era, along with other canine deities. His image, with the other sons of *Horus*, was added to funerary artifacts from this period until the fourth century [FIGURE 14]<sup>63</sup>.



[FIGURE 14]: *Anubis, as a cynocephalus, mummifies the corpse and is accompanied by the four sons of Horus; among them, Duamutef is depicted in the hybrid form with a canine's head. Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Buxelles, End of the Ptolemaic Period, <https://rb.gy/44thev>, accessed on (28/11/2023).*

<sup>63</sup> N<sup>o</sup>. E8242. Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Buxelles. WILFONG 2015: 68.

#### 4. *Anupet*

*Anupet* was the female counterpart of *Anubis*, who was worshiped in the 17<sup>th</sup> Nome of Upper Egypt. Her cult started at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty. She was like *Anubis* because she was connected with the moon and was considered to be a protector of the 17<sup>th</sup> lunar day<sup>64</sup>. *Anupet* was protected *Osiris* from his enemies, and used her sharp teeth to kill Seth<sup>65</sup>.

*Anupet* was not often represented in art. However, her best known iconography was of a woman wearing a standard surmounted by a jackal,<sup>66</sup> or less frequently, as a canine suckling young puppy, a complete jackal, a lion-headed jackal, or a hippopotamus with the head of a dog<sup>67</sup>. She has only appeared in the temple of Dendera in the *cynocephalus* form with a woman's body and a canid's head [FIGURE 15]<sup>68</sup>.



[FIGURE 15]: *Anupet* as a *cynocephalus* holding knives for the protection of *Osiris*. Dendera Temple, Ptolemaic period. CAUVILLE 1934: PL.X 92.

#### 5. *Nekhen*

The souls of *Nekhen* (Hierakonpolis in Upper Egypt) were represented with canines' heads, and *Pe* souls were depicted with falcon's heads (Buto in Lower Egypt). They were the spirits of the ancestral rulers of Egypt. The powerful spirits of *Nekhen* and *Pe* were related to the West, and were the ones who helped the king during his life and after his death ascend to the sky<sup>69</sup>. The spirits of *Nekhen* and *Pe* were depicted making the *Henu*

<sup>64</sup> KAMEL 2007: 8.

<sup>65</sup> DUQUESNE 2005: 403-404.

<sup>66</sup> Nr<sup>o</sup>. JE40619. The Egyptian Museum in Cairo. *Anupet* was depicted as a female with a jackal on a standard above her head in one of the triads of *Menkaura*, with the King and goddess *Hathor* personifying the Nome of *Cynopolis*. The 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty, Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Nr<sup>o</sup>. JE 40679. HAWASS 2001: 52-53.

<sup>67</sup> KAMEL 2007: 8.

<sup>68</sup> WILKINSON 2003: 190; HELCK & WESTENDORF 1975b: 163.

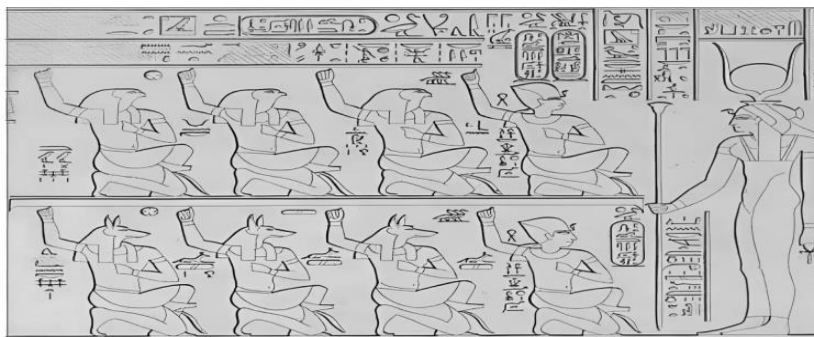
<sup>69</sup> MAGDY 2021: 98-99.



gesture to rejoice the solar boat's arrival [FIGURE 16]<sup>70</sup>. They are represented accompanying the king in front of a deity on the walls of Ptolemaic temples [FIGURE 17]<sup>71</sup>.



[FIGURE 16]: The king between the *cynocephalus* spirit of *Nekhen* and the falcon-headed spirit of *Pe* making the *Henu* gesture. Tomb of Ramses I (KV 16), Valley of the kings, 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The official site of the Osirisnet project for Egyptological publications, [https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/pharaons/ramses1/e\\_ramses1\\_02.htm](https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/pharaons/ramses1/e_ramses1_02.htm), accessed on (28/11/2023).



[FIGURE 17]: The falcon-headed souls of *Pe* and the *cynocephalus* souls of *Nekhen* are following King Ptolemy VI while making the *Henu* gesture in front of goddess Isis. Temple of Phiale, Ptolemaic period. MAGDY 2021: 111, FIG.11.

## 6. The *Cynocephali Genii* or Demons

The Ancient Egyptians believed in two types of genii: protective spirits that safeguarded individuals and malevolent genii that caused harm and diseases. Among these protective *genii*, those who were responsible for the protection of the doors leading to the afterlife; the deceased could pass through these doors as long as they were able to name the door and its guardian. They were supernatural creatures who were intermediaries between deities and beings. They resembled the gods but had more specific tasks. These demons could take different hybrid iconographies, such as birds, insects, or animals' heads and human bodies. Among these forms was the *cynocephalus* demon [FIGURE 18], but it is difficult to associate certain animal heads with a demon, as each guardian could embody different forms<sup>72</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> DEQUENSE 2012: 12.

<sup>71</sup> MAGDY 2021: 103.

<sup>72</sup> LUCARELLI 2010: 86-87.





[FIGURE 18]: The *cynocephali* demon guardian of the ninth door holding a knife. Tomb of *Sennedjem* (TT 1), Thebes, 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The official site of the Osirisnet project for Egyptological publication; [https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/artisans/sennedjem1/e\\_sennedjem1\\_01.htm](https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/artisans/sennedjem1/e_sennedjem1_01.htm), accessed on (26/11/2023)

During the Greco-Roman era, the protective *genii* continued to protect the gates of the Netherworld, and their images were added to the walls of the tombs and temples [FIGURE 19]. The acceptance of the *genii* or demons during this period relied on their presence in Hellenistic and Roman beliefs as protectors of the deceased, which were consistent with Ancient Egyptian beliefs<sup>73</sup>. The protective power of the *genie* was mingled with *Anubis's* role. Accordingly, in very rare scenes from this period, *Anubis* was depicted in the form of a *cynocephalus genie* [FIGURE 20]<sup>74</sup>.



[FIGURE 19]: A *cynocephalus* demon holding knives. Dendera temple. Ptolemaic period. CAUVILLE 1934: PL. X 196.

<sup>73</sup> LUCARELLI 2011: 120. 'ABDAL-SALĀM 2021: 80-81.

<sup>74</sup> 'ABDAL-SALĀM 2021: 80-81.



[FIGURE 20]: *Anubis as a cynocephalus genie holding knives. Badi Bastet tomb, al-Mazouka, Dakhla Oasis.*  
 'ABDAL-SALĀM 2021: 80-81, PL.31.

While there were other canine deities, they were more often mentioned in texts than depicted in imagery. Although categorized as canine, some lacked distinct iconography and were represented only in fully anthropomorphic form. They were considered counterparts, identifiers, or diminutives of the great canine deities. The god *Khentiamentiou* was a funerary deity whose name means «Foremost of Westerners». He appeared firstly with the title of *Anubis*, then as a separate deity, and finally as the title of *Osiris* until he was completely replaced by *Osiris*. God *Wepiu's* name means «Judger, divider or opener». He could be a diminutive of *Wepwawet*, but he appeared in some Pyramid and Coffin text spells as a separate deity: as an opener of the gates in front of the king. The god *Sed* was a jackal deity who was independent or connected with *Wepwawet* and *Anubis*. He was associated with *Ma'at* as a supporter of justice, and was called «the foremost of his court». *Hereret* was the female counterpart of *Wepwawet*. Her name was mentioned in warfare texts, indicating her role as a warrior goddess like *Wepwawet*. During the Greco-Roman era, a three-headed monster called *Cerberus* was identified with the god *Anubis*. He was responsible for guarding *Hades* and preventing the deceased souls from leaving<sup>75</sup>.

### III. CYNOCEPHALI IN COPTIC ART

*Cynocephali* images from Ancient Egyptian art probably inspired the Byzantine and Christian worlds. This iconography continued in Coptic art as different characters were depicted as dog-headed humans<sup>76</sup>.

#### 1. Saint Christopher

Many sources wrote about Saint Christopher, who became a popular Saint in Egypt in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. Latin accounts describe him as the son of a pagan king whose wife was blessed by the Virgin Mary, enabling her to conceive a son named *Offerus* or *Reprobus*. He became very powerful and was intended to serve only the most powerful beings in the world. He served a mighty king and Satan. After serving them for

<sup>75</sup> WILKINSON 2003: 191; DUQUESNE 2005: 390, 401-405; WILFONG 2015: 64.

<sup>76</sup> WILFONG 2015: 79.

some time, he discovered that both had fears; the king lacked courage and Satan was afraid of the cross. Then, *Offerus* searched for a new master, which was when he found a hermit who talked to him about Christ. So, *Offerus* felt that Christ could be his master. He became a believer of Christ and was baptized with the name Christopher, i.e., Bearer of Christ. Saint Christopher's new name was given to him because he was a traveler and ferryman. He was famous for carrying people for God's sake. One day, Saint Christopher encountered a child and carried him across the river. As he walked, he felt the child grow heavier, as if he were carrying the whole world. The child ordered him to fix his staff in the ground, which by the next morning had been miraculously transformed into a palm tree. The child he carried grew up and revealed himself to be Christ. Many of St. Christopher's icons depict him as a man carrying a child on his shoulders. Saint Christopher performed many miracles that converted people to Christianity, until he was sent to prison in Antioch, where he was tortured and beheaded<sup>77</sup>.

Some fifth to the eighteenth century icons of Saint Christopher depict him in the *cynocephalus* form. The oldest icon dates to the reign of Justinian and was found in the Monastery of Saint Catherine in Mount Sinai<sup>78</sup>. Probably, the earliest icons of Saint Christopher were destroyed by the iconoclasts<sup>79</sup>.

There were various interpretations of the representation of Saint Christopher with the *cynocephalus* form. One interpretation from Ethiopian manuscripts, which date back to the fourteenth century, explain that Saint Christopher was from the Marmaritae tribe, who were area in modern Libya. The manuscripts also mentioned that he was imprisoned by the Romans who believed that the Marmaritae tribe were cannibals; this might explain his Saint Christopher's hybrid appearance<sup>80</sup>. Another reason was that Saint Christopher's Canaanite origin was confused with the Latin word «*canineus*» which means dog. Another interpretation suggests that Saint Christopher's portrayal may refer to Recklinghausen's disease, a human disorder characterized by the growth of tumors<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> STEFANOVIĆ 2013: 509-511.

<sup>78</sup> Icon of Saint Christopher as a *cynocephalus* holding a cross with a halo surrounding his head. From Cappadocia, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens BXM 01571. Byzantine and Christian Museum. AMEISENOWA 1949: 42; <https://www.ebyzantinemuseum.gr/?i = bxm.en.exhibit&id=59>, accessed on (26/11/2023).

<sup>79</sup> Iconoclasm is a movement that happened during the eighth and the ninth centuries. It was started by Emperor Leo III (717-741) who opposed the icons and issued two decrees that prohibited their veneration and ordered their destruction. However, the most violent movement against the iconodules was during the reign of his son, Constantine V (741-775), who was considered the leader of the iconoclasts. He launched an offensive violent campaign against them and the icons. Then, he was followed by his son Leo IV (775-780). After his death, his wife Irene of Athens (780-797) ruled and called for the seventh Ecumenical council in Nicaea in 787, which successfully upheld the veneration of the icons. However, the iconoclast's movement did not end until the reign of Theodora (842-855), who restored the veneration of icons in 842. MENELAOU 2017: 50-52.

<sup>80</sup> MALAISE 2014: 93.

<sup>81</sup> STEFANOVIĆ 2013: 510-511.

Another opinion is that the icons of Saint Christopher seemed to be influenced by *Anubis's* iconography since they shared some attributes. Just as *Anubis* and *Hermes* were seen as conductors of deceased souls to the afterlife, Saint Christopher protected Christian believers from sudden death<sup>82</sup>.

The image of *Anubis* raising the lunar disc of Osiris symbolized resurrection. This image connects the icons of Saint Christopher carrying Christ to Ancient Egyptian beliefs, where Osiris was the god of resurrection. Similarly, in Christian beliefs, Jesus is a figure symbolizing resurrection<sup>83</sup>. Saint Christopher also shared attributes with *Hermanubis* or the Roman *Anubis*, such as the military costumes and the palm branch<sup>84</sup>. Another interpretation links the *cynocephalus* iconography to a mix-up by Coptic hagiographers, who confused *cynocephali* creatures with the satyrs of the Greek mythology<sup>85</sup>.

## 2. *Ahrakas* and *Oghani*

The Coptic Museum has an icon that depicts two *cynocephali* saints with halos framing their heads [FIGURE 21]. Their names, *Ahrakas* and *Oghani*, are written above their heads, and they might be the *cynocephali* servants of Saint Mercurius<sup>86</sup>. Saint Mercurius's father and grandfather were skilled hunters, but one day while hunting, they faced two cannibals who devoured the saint's grandfather. Fortunately, his father was rescued by the angel of the god [FIGURE 22]<sup>87</sup>. The cannibals found themselves surrounded by fire, which transformed them into tamed lambs, who then followed Saint Mercurius's father and remained with him until the birth of Philopator. Saint Mercurius (Philopator) became a soldier in the army, and the cannibals, after converting to Christianity, followed him<sup>88</sup>.



[FIGURE 21]: Icon of the two *cynocephali* saints, *Ahrakas* and *Oghani*. Coptic Museum in Cairo, 18<sup>th</sup> century. FADEL 2022: 290, FIG. 36.

<sup>82</sup> AMEISENOWA 1949: 44.

<sup>83</sup> RITER 1985: 154; MILLARD 1987: 237-238; STEFANOVIĆ 2013: 511-512.

<sup>84</sup> STEFANOVIĆ 2013: 511-512.

<sup>85</sup> PIANKOFF 1942: 24.

<sup>86</sup> Nr<sup>o</sup>.3375. The Coptic Museum in Cairo. STEFANOVIĆ 2013: 506-514.

<sup>87</sup> BOLMAN & GODEAU 2002: 113-116, FIG.7.19.

<sup>88</sup> BASSET 1909: 337.



[FIGURE 22]: Two cannibals devouring Saint Mercurius's grandfather. Monastery of Saint Antony at the Red Sea, 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century. BOLMAN & GODEAU 2002: 113-116, FIG.7.19.

### 3. *Cynocephali* with Saint Andrew

The apostles of Christ were sent throughout the world to preach. Andrew was sent to a land called Kalbin, which the Syrians called the land of the dogs<sup>89</sup>. When Saint Andrew arrived to the town's streets, he saw a crowd of people barking like dogs. He ran away, but after seeing a vision of Christ, Saint Andrew returned to the town. He saw the cannibals barking, and with the sign of the cross, the people's hands, legs, and tongues shriveled. Some of the messengers went to the king of the town, who begged Saint Andrew to heal the populace. After the destruction of the idols, the king and the people of the town were baptized, and they were transformed from *cynocephali* into the beauty of the children of light [FIGURE 23]<sup>90</sup>.

<sup>89</sup> There are many myths related to the origin of the *cynocephali* population; among them was the oldest myth that is from the Fezzân area near Gartûn in Libya. There was an area called *Bâr al-Kilâb/ Wādî al-Kilâb* (region of the dogs), in which dogs lived on one side of the river and humans on the other side. Along the *wadi*, there was a kind of thorn in which humans could pass but the dogs could not. One day a woman decided to pass the river and went to live with the dogs. A dog possessed her and she became pregnant with the first *cynocephalus* creature. There are other versions of this story from this region, including one in which men change to dogs during dusk or by rolling in ashes. It is believed that *cynocephali* were widespread in antiquity in the areas of Libya, Egypt, and Ethiopia. Herodotus was the first one to mention the *cynocephalus* in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC and their presence in eastern Libya. The apocryphal life of Saint Bartholomew recounts that he was sent to preach alongside Saint Andrew in the lands of Berbers where they were protected from wild beasts under the protection of the *cynocephalus*. This suggests that the area was located in northern Africa. PIANKOFF 1942: 18-19; D'HUY 2013: 108-110.

<sup>90</sup> VAN ESBROECK 1999: 32-34; INNEMÉE 2016: 28.





[FIGURE 23]: A scene of Saint Andrew preaching in the land Kalbin. The populace before baptism in *the cynocephali* form and after baptism with human features. Monastery of the Syrians in Wādī Natrūn, probably from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. INNEMÉE 2016: 28, FIGS.24-25.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The iconography of the *cynocephalus* emerged from the Ancient Egyptian religion. The acceptance of the hybrid form featuring a canine head and human body was due to the veneration of the animals, especially canines, reflecting a belief in their equality with human beings. The importance of *cynocephalus* iconography can be attributed to the prominence of canine deities in the Ancient Egyptian pantheon, which were considered to be chthonic creatures belonging to the lands of the living and the land of the dead. Moreover, they were associated with the sacred concepts of death and resurrection since the Predynastic period, as canines were often linked to the practice of exhuming animals from tombs. Canine deities were depicted as *cynocephali* performing different funerary roles, such as mummifying the deceased and protecting the corpse and tomb. They guided the deceased in his journey to the afterlife and opened the sky in front of him. The choice of the hybrid form aimed to blend the qualities of the animal with the human behaviors.

*Cynocephalus* iconography continued throughout the Greco-Roman era due to the incorporation of Ancient Egyptian beliefs with Hellenic ideas. Although the Hellenic Egyptians rejected zoomorphic or hybrid representations of their deities, worship of canine gods persisted, particularly that of *Anubis*. During this period, Anubis's cult flourished, and he gained a new role as a cosmic deity, ruling over the sky and earth. The cult of the god *Anubis* extended beyond the borders of Egypt. He was synchronized with the Greek god *Hermes*, who was also a both were *psychopomp* deity, and adopted some of his attributes. Other cults for Ancient canine deities continued into this era. They also retained their *cynocephali* iconography. Other deities, such as the goddess *Anupet*, the female counterpart of *Anubis*, adopted this distinctive iconography during this time.

Ancient Egyptian art left behind an extensive and opulent iconographic legacy that was incorporated into later Coptic art. This influence was seen in *cynocephalus* iconography, but Coptic artists were inspired by other significant motifs and depictions as well. For instance, the maternity and suckling scenes of *Isis* and *Horus* inspired similar



images of the Virgin Mary and Christ, and representations of *Horus* fighting with *Seth* parallel depictions of warrior saints conquering dragons. The common iconographical associations of canines in Christian ideology were corruption, humility, subservience, destruction, evilness, and sin. However, dogs sometimes signified watchfulness and loyalty. The diverse symbolism associated with canines led to a profound shift in the significance of *cynocephalus* iconography within Coptic art. However, hybrid representations of animal-headed humans were rare in Coptic art, unlike in Ancient Egyptian iconography.

In Coptic art, the *cynocephali* were portrayed as sinful individuals or cannibalistic beings, such as in the mural painting of Saint Andrew and the cannibals of Saint Mercurius. The representation of the cannibals in the *cynocephalus* form was probably due to the canine nature of eating human flesh. This connection mirrors the choice of canine-headed deities as gods of death and resurrection in Ancient Egypt given their tendency to exhume tombs while searching for corpses.

However, a unique and untraditional iconography was the depiction of saints in *cynocephali* form, such as Saint Christopher, *Ahrakas*, and *Oghani*. This representation could refer to the Christian belief of accepting all people, despite their past, nature, or features. The distinctive representation of *cynocephali* may have roots in Ancient Egyptian iconography, particularly that of Anubis and other *cynocephali* creatures. Notably, Saint Christopher, the first saint depicted in this form, shares characteristics with *Anubis/Hermanubis*, including their connection to death, resurrection, similar costumes, and palm branch symbolism. *Cynocephalus* iconography probably persisted in Coptic and Byzantine arts from the fifth to the eighteenth centuries. The enduring representation over thirteen centuries reflects the widespread integration of these themes into the artists' intuitive practices. Despite the prohibition of Ancient Egyptian paganist beliefs and the domination of Christianity in the Byzantine Empire, Ancient Egyptian art remained an effective inspirational source for Coptic art. Ancient Egyptian iconographies continued to thrive in Coptic heritage, even beyond Egypt's borders. However, the controversy surrounding this idea arose from the tension between Ancient Egyptian heritage and Christian dogma. Thus, *cynocephalus* iconography was no longer related to deities but to saints, cannibals, and sinners. Finally, it is important to note that *cynocephalus* iconography was a unique phenomenon, appearing infrequently in Coptic art.

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