

PN-ACN-171

MONASTERY OF ST. PAUL

William Lyster

Photographs by
Patrick Godeau



American Research Center in Egypt, Inc.

Conservation work was carried out at the Monastery of St. Paul from 1997 to 1998 by the American Research Center in Egypt, Inc. through its Antiquities Development Project, in collaboration with the Supreme Council of Antiquities, under the supervision of the Monastery of St. Paul, and with the blessing of Bishop Agathon. It was financed by a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Promotion of Sustainable Tourism and Cultural Activities Project.

This publication was made possible through support provided by the Project Development Support/Program (PDS/P), USAID/Egypt, U. S. Agency for International Development, under terms of Grant No. 263-G-00-96-00016-00. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U. S. Agency for International Development.

The author would like to thank:

His Grace Anba Agathon and the monks of the Monastery of St. Paul for their support and hospitality.

Fr. Macari, Fr. Sawirus, and Fr. Yusif for their kind assistance.

Samir Morcos for the *illustrations on the cover and pages 4-5 and 38.*

Elizabeth Bolman for additional photographs on pages: 17 (left), 24 (left & right), 25 (left), 26, 31, 35 (top), 37 (top & bottom), 45, 46, 53 (top) and 63 (top).

Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC for permission to use the photographs from the 1931 Whittmore expedition on pages 32, 33 and 43.

Adriano Luzi for permission to use Pococke's 1743 plan of the Monastery of St. Paul on page 31.

The map of the Monastery was produced for ARCE by Mallinson Architects

Layout and design by the author.

Printed by Elias Modern Publishing House, Cairo

under the supervision of

The Palm Press, Cairo (340-9867).

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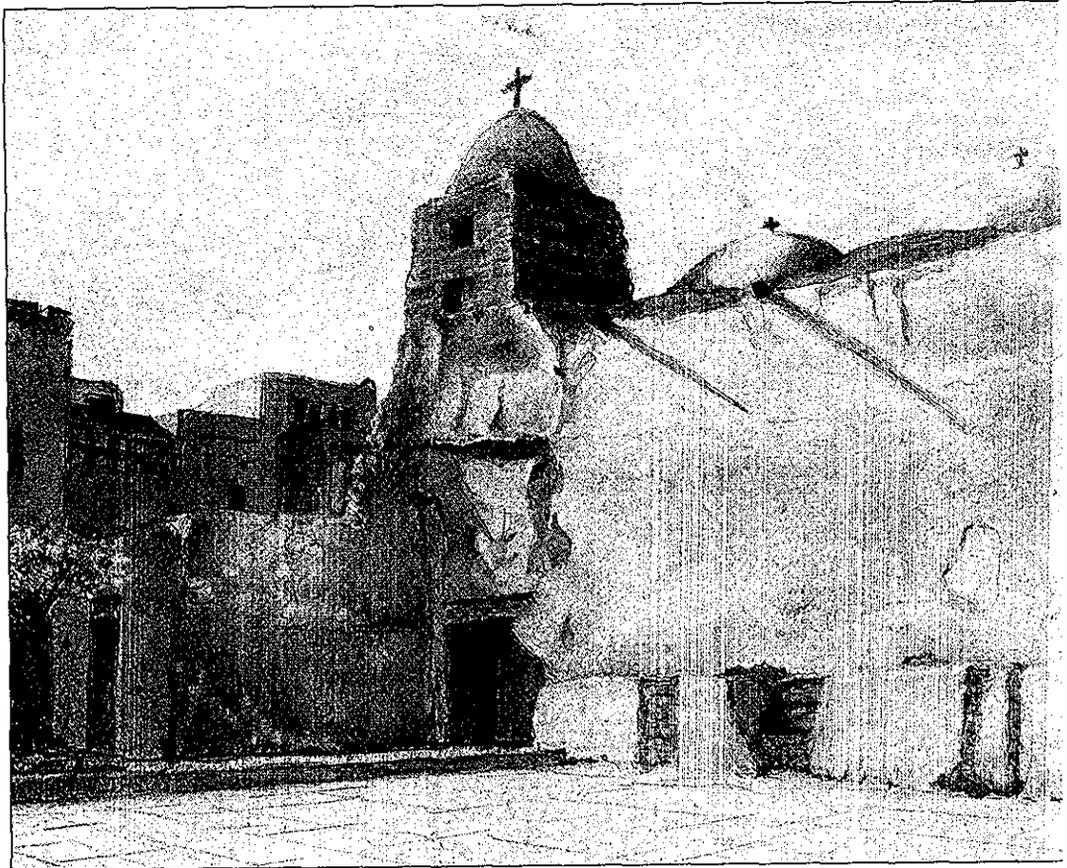
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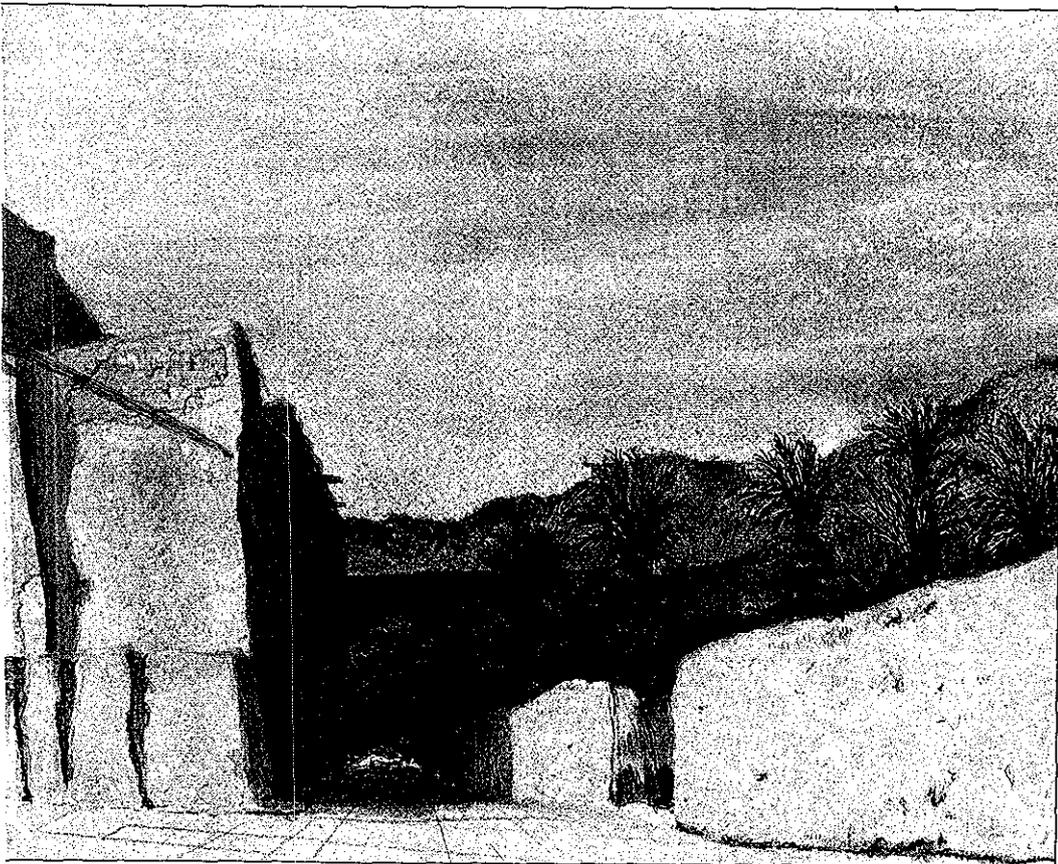
*His Holiness Shenouda III
Pope of Alexandria and
Patriarch of the See of St. Mark.*

MONASTERY OF ST. PAUL

Foreword by His Grace Anba Agathon, Bishop of Ismailia	6	Getting to the Monastery	34
Foreword by Michael Jones, ADP Project Manager	7	Walls	36
Life of St. Paul	9	Fatuli and Ma'tama	37
History of the Coptic Church	10	Keep	38
Lives of the Martyrs	14	Coptic Churches	40
The Desert Fathers	20	Cave Church of St. Paul	42
History of the Monastery	28	Church of St. Mercurius	52
		Church of St. Michael	54
		Cells	56



Refectory	58	Icons	72
Mills and Diksar	60	Eucharistic Vessels	80
Garden	61	Vestments	86
Cave of St. Marqus	63	Coptic Calendar	91
Spring	64	Notes	92
Modern Buildings	66	Bibliography	94
Library	67	Map of Egypt	34
Manuscripts	68	Map of Monastery	inside back cover



FOREWORD BY HIS GRACE ANBA AGATHON

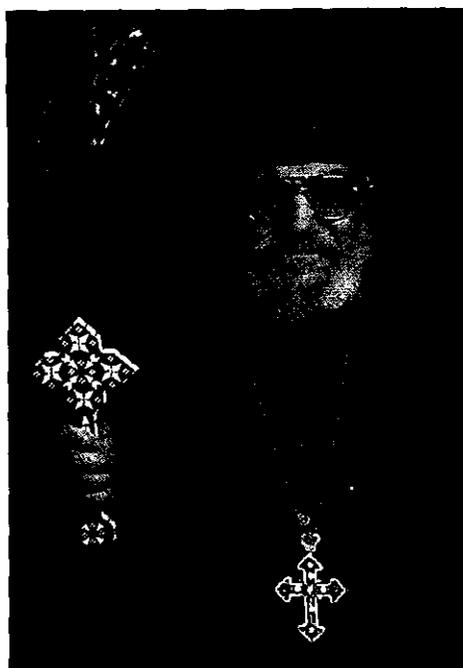
Bishop of Ismailia and Abbot
of the Monastery of St. Paul

Who am I but a sinner? And how can a sinner write anything about the great Saint Paul, the first spiritual hermit? I am deeply aware of my own imperfections. I am just a novice when it comes to living the angelic life practiced by St. Paul. It is, therefore, with the greatest humility that I speak of him as a holy example for us all.

It was after meeting this great saint, that St. Antony said of himself to his disciples, "It is dishonest of me to call myself a monk now that I have seen the blessed Paul." If the Father of Monks spoke thus, it is sufficient for me to merely contemplate the spiritual life of St. Paul.

Living alone in the desert for decades, far removed from the world, St. Paul devoted himself to prayer and the love of God. And although he owned nothing but a simple tunic of palm leaves, St. Paul lacked nothing because of his faith.

The example of his pure life will help us during our short journey here on earth. We treasure and live by the only words he left us when



he said: "Whoever escapes hardship, escapes God."

It is a blessing and an honor to have served the Monastery of Saint Paul since 1974. I have great faith that through the blessing of Jesus Christ the Monastery will continue to grow until it becomes a beacon lighting the way for all people.

We ask the Blessed Virgin Mary for forgiveness and the great Saint Paul for his prayers. May we be guided by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, whose devotion to the Church and monasticism has resulted in such tremendous achievements. May God save his life and extend his time among us. And for our God, eternal glory, Amen.

FOREWORD BY MICHAEL JONES

Project Manager of the Antiquities
Development Project of the
American Research Center in
Egypt

This guide book completes the architectural conservation project carried out at the Monastery of St. Paul from 1997 to 1998 by the American Research Center in Egypt in collaboration with the Supreme Council of Antiquities. The project was financed by a grant from USAID, and was implemented on site by el-Dahan and Farid Consultants (architects).

The purpose of the project was to restore and to present to visitors part of the original ancient nucleus of the Monastery, including the two mill rooms, the refectory and part of the outer walls. In the refectory only limited intervention was necessary, whereas in one of the mill rooms and in part of the outer wall large sections of the original structure had to be rebuilt. Traditional building materials were used throughout the work comprising sun-dried mudbricks made from the local desert clay, sandstone from the old quarries nearby, palm logs from the Nile valley and matting made on site.

The guiding principle was that the monastery is not a museum but

a living community, and has been so since the fourth century, in which the monks have always found their own solutions. Therefore the monks constantly participated in the work and their suggestions and advice were actively sought. This fruitful collaboration has produced a result that strikingly reflects the appropriate use of traditional materials. It shows how the monks themselves would have done the same job at any time during the Monastery's long history.

This new guidebook strives to present the Monastery to visitors and the wider public by applying the same principle as those outlined above for the restoration. Its purpose is to illustrate the architectural, artistic and religious richness of this immensely important and holy site as the representative of one of the oldest continuing Christian traditions still flourishing in the modern world.

The Monastery of St. Paul is a precious inheritance. It is hoped that this book will spread awareness of and appreciation for the monks who live there and for the Monastery itself, both in its physical location and in all the cultural and spiritual values that are supported by its continued wellbeing.



St. Paul the First Hermit (icon dated 1730).

"Others, whose opinion is commonly accepted, claim that Antony was the first monk to inhabit the desert, which is partly true, for it is not so much that he came before all the others but rather that he inspired everyone with a commitment to this way of life. Antony's disciples affirmed to this day that the blessed Paul was the originator of the practice, though not of the name, of the solitary life, and this is the view I also take."

St. Jerome, Life of St. Paul (c.377).

ST. PAUL THE FIRST HERMIT

St. Paul was born in Alexandria to a wealthy Christian family. In AD 250, during the persecution of Emperor Decius, the sixteen-year-old St. Paul withdrew into the desert. Learning that his brother-in-law planned to betray him in order to inherit his wealth, the saint decided not to return to his former life.

Moving deeper into the desert, he came to a mountain near the Red Sea, where he found a small cave near a spring and a palm tree. St. Paul spent the rest of his life there in prayer and solitude. The palm tree provided him with food and clothing.

In about 343, St. Antony, who was living in another part of the desert, had a vision of St. Paul. Setting out from his hermitage, he eventually found the cave of the holy hermit. While the two were talking, a crow placed a whole loaf of bread in front of them. St. Paul said, "Look, the Lord has sent us our supper. For the last sixty years I have always received half a loaf, but in honor of your arrival Christ has doubled His soldiers' rations."

After they had eaten, St. Paul said, "The time of my death is close at hand and you have been sent by the Lord to

cover my poor body with earth. So I beg you to go back and bring me the cloak which Bishop Athanasius gave you and wrap it around my poor body." Weeping in silence, St. Antony kissed his eyes and hands and set off for his cave.

Returning to the cave he found the lifeless body of St. Paul kneeling in prayer. After wrapping the body, St. Antony brought it outside, but he did not have a spade to dig a grave. Then two lions came from the desert and dug out a space with their paws, large enough for one man. As soon as they had gone away, St. Antony buried the holy corpse in the grave.

He took the tunic St. Paul had woven for himself out of palm leaves like a wicker basket, and returned home. Thereafter, St. Antony always wore the tunic on the feast days of Easter and Pentecost.

Thirty years after the death of the blessed Paul, St. Jerome wrote an account of his life in Latin. It was soon translated into Greek. The *Life of St. Paul*, together with the *Life of St. Antony* by St. Athanasius, helped spread monasticism throughout the Christian world. In the Churches of both the East and the West, St. Paul is venerated as the First Hermit, while St. Antony is known as the Father of Monasticism.

HISTORY OF THE COPTIC CHURCH

Egypt is blessed by being the only country Jesus Christ visited outside the land of his birth. According to the Gospel of St. Matthew, the flight of the Holy Family was inspired by an angelic vision warning of Herod's Massacre of the Innocents.

Every year, the Coptic Church celebrates the Entry of Our Lord into Egypt with the words, "Be glad and rejoice, O Egypt, for there hath come to thee the Lover of humanity."

Egypt was then a province of the Roman Empire. It had been annexed by Augustus Caesar in 30 BC after the death of Cleopatra, the last of the country's Greek monarchs.



Virgin and Child; St. Paul the Hermit; SS. George and Theodore the Martyrs.

Alexandria, the capital of Egypt, was one of the largest cities in the Empire. Famed for the Pharos Lighthouse, the Museion and the Great Library, it was a leading center of Greek learning and culture.

The Holy Family never visited the predominately Greek city of Alexandria. They spent three years traveling among the Copts, the descendants of the ancient Egyptians.

The name Copt derives from *Aigyptios*, the Greek for 'Egyptian'. The Arabs pronounced this *Qibt*, which then passed into European languages as *Copt*. The name is currently used to describe Christian Egyptians who belong to the Orthodox Church of Egypt.

The Coptic Church is an apostolic foundation, which follows faithfully the traditions of the disciples of Jesus. St. Mark the Evangelist was the first in an unbroken line of 117 patriarchs of the Egyptian Church. He began preaching the Gospel in Alexandria during the reign of Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54).

So great was the number of his converts, that the pagans regarded him as a threat to the religious cults of the city. In AD 68, St. Mark was killed by an infuriated mob, while celebrating Easter. He was the first in a long line of Egyptian martyrs.

There were ten persecutions of the early Church, which had been prefigured in the Bible by the ten plagues of Egypt and the ten horns of the beast of the Apocalypse. The first assault was under Nero (54-68), who blamed the Christians for starting the great fire of Rome.

Early persecutions were sporadic. The emperors Domitian (81-96), Hadrian (117-138) and Marcus Aurelius (161-180) all issued edicts against the Church, but left it to local initiative to implicate their decrees. Attacks on Christians were usually the result of random outbreaks of pagan violence. Despite imperial opposition, the position of the Church steadily improved.

The early history of the Church of Alexandria is obscure. The ten successors of St. Mark are known only by name. It is not until Demetrius I (188-230), the twelfth patriarch, that the sources supply historical details. The Christian community at that time appears to have been large and comparatively wealthy. It possessed its own churches, as well as the most famous Christian school in the Empire.

According to tradition, the Catechetical School of Alexandria was founded by St. Mark to instruct converts in the tenets of the faith. Pantaenus (c.180-c.190), the first



St. Stephen, the Proto-Martyr.

recorded head of the school, expanded the curriculum to include philosophy and the Greek humanities. Under St. Clement (d.215) and Origen (d.254), both brilliant scholars, the Catechetical School became a rival of the pagan Museion as a center of learning.

The success of the Church drew the wrath of the imperial authorities. Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211) launched the first coordinated persecution of Christians throughout the Empire. Alexandria was particularly hard hit. Among the martyrs was Origen's father.

The Severan persecution was the first great test of the Egyptian Christians. Their willingness to die for their faith ensured that the Church emerged stronger from the ordeal.

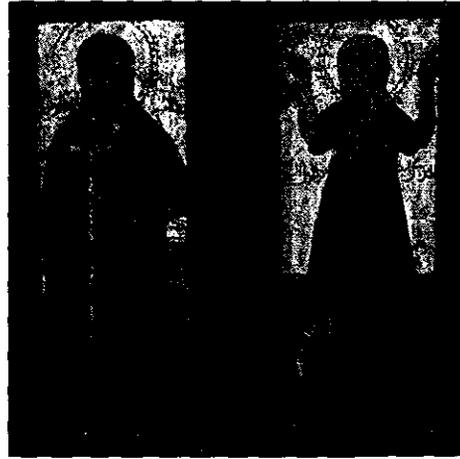
The third century was a time of crisis. The Romans were threatened by powerful enemies and divided by civil war. As the Empire neared collapse, people turned to the Church. In Egypt, the Gospel was translated into Coptic and spread rapidly throughout the Nile valley.

Emperor Decius (249-251) tried to stop the growth of the Church by issuing a universal order to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. The penalty for refusal was death.

Many Egyptian were martyred, while others escaped into the desert. It was during the Decian persecution that St. Paul began his life as the first Christian hermit.

After Decius was killed in battle against the Goths, his successor Valerian (253-260) renewed the order to sacrifice. The persecution came to a sudden end when the emperor was captured by the Persians. For the next forty years, the Church grew in peace.

In 270, St. Antony, a Copt from Upper Egypt, retired into the desert to devote himself to a life of prayer. By the end of the century, he had attracted disciples, who formed the first community of Christian monks. St. Antony is revered as the Father of Monasticism, which practice soon spread to the rest of the world.



St. Antony and St. Paul.

The Coptic calendar is known as the 'Era of the Martyrs.' It begins in 284, the disastrous year that Diocletian became emperor.

Diocletian (284-305) brought an end to civil war and reorganized the Empire as a strictly regimented domain. In 303, he declared war on the Church.

The Great Persecution (303-312) began with the dismissal of Christians from the government and army. A later edict ordered everyone to offer sacrifice on pain of death. The number of martyrs was legion.

The most ferocious assault was directed against Egypt, where Christians formed the majority of the population. Eusebius (d.339), the earliest historian of the Church, reports the deaths of thousands of Copts. He says, "at times a hundred men would be slain in a single day along with women and children."

The conversion of Emperor Constantine (307-337) brought an end to persecution. Henceforth, the Empire was to be Christian, and would have Constantinople as its capital.

In 325, Constantine summoned the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in Asia Minor. The assembled bishops issued the Nicene Creed, which was to remain a touchstone of orthodoxy.

During the reign of Constantine, monasticism in Egypt grew at a phenomenal rate. Thousands of men and women abandoned the world for a life of the spirit, until "the desert grew full of monks."

St. Athanasius (326-373), the twentieth Patriarch of the Coptic Church, suffered exile five times for refusing to deviate from the Creed of Nicaea. In his struggle against heresy, Athanasius enjoyed the support of the Egyptian monks. He spent his third exile (356-362) in a Coptic monastery, where he wrote the *Life of St. Antony*.

St. Cyril (412-444), the twenty-fourth Patriarch, is revered as the "Seal of the Fathers." At the Council of Ephesus in 431, he defended the unity of Christ's person, divine and human, against the heretical teachings of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople.

St. Dioscorus (444-454), the twenty-fifth Patriarch, upheld the teachings of SS. Athanasius and Cyril that Christ has "two natures - divine and human - mystically united in one, without confusion, corruption or change." His opponents held that the human and divine natures of Christ remained separate.

At the Council of Chalcedon (451), this theological dispute was used to curb the independent authority of Alexandria. Dioscorus was deposed, but the teachings of SS. Athanasius and Cyril were accepted as orthodox.

The Copts united behind their patriarch, refusing communion with all supporters of Chalcedon, including the emperor. Once again, the Coptic Church faced imperial persecution.



St. Dioscorus, 25th Patriarch.



St. Isidore of Antioch

from the Dome of the Martyrs in the Cave Church of St. Paul.

"Soldiers cut open his body, and dragged out his bowels, and threw them into the desert; but neither the fowl of the air nor the wild beasts would approach them. And our Redeemer healed him, and raised him up."

LIVES OF THE MARTYRS

Jesus warned his disciples that they would face persecution. He also told them, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven" (Matthew 5:12), because whoever "loses his life for my sake, will save it" (Mark 8:35).

According to St. Hippolytus, martyred in 235, "Martyrs leave this world in glory. Their sins are forgiven. Like the Three Holy Children they will receive a heavenly crown."

Martyrdom was the highest ideal of the early Church. The historian Lactantius (d.320) declared that it was a means through which God won pagans to His service, "for they wanted to know more about this belief which men were prepared to defend to the death, and having learnt about it, accepted it themselves."

Those who gave their lives as witnesses to the truth of the Gospel earned a place among the first saints of the Church. St. Julius of Aqfahs devoted himself to recording their lives. Others followed his example.

The Coptic Synaxarion, the compilation of the lives of the saints, names 381 martyrs. Nearly half of these are stated to have suffered in the Great Persecution of 303-312.

Although humble weavers and pious widows are found among the martyrs, most are of noble birth. Many are soldiers, often holding the high rank of *stratelates* (general). Others are the chaste sons and daughters of imperial officials.

The saint first receives a heavenly call to martyrdom. St. Isidore was told of his destiny by the Archangel Michael. St. Menas had a vision of martyrs around the throne of God.

Sometimes, a journey must be undertaken. SS. Apater and Eirene, the son and daughter of the governor of Syria, received angelic instructions to find martyrdom in Egypt.

The saint may perform miracles while traveling. St. Theodore Stratelates killed a dragon before winning a martyr's crown.

SS. Apater and Eirene, once in Egypt, avoided arrest for as long as they could. Martyrdom is a divine blessing, not to be sought vainly.

The saint is finally apprehended and brought before the imperial authorities. Diocletian himself condemned both St. Isidore and St. George. The emperor's governor of Upper Egypt, Arianus, is often the adversary in the lives of Coptic martyrs. SS. Julius of Aqfahs, Apater and Eirene all suffered martyrdom at his hands.

After professing belief in Jesus Christ, the saint is subjected to the most hideous tortures. These he endures patiently while praying for the forgiveness of his tormentors.

Sometimes an angel assists the martyr, rendering all punishment harmless. St. Abiskhirun was raised up whole and uninjured by an angel after each agonizing session.

SS. Cyriacus and Julitta (an infant and his mother) were thrown into a cauldron of molten copper, but it seemed to them as refreshing as dew from heaven. When a few drops splashed on the governor, however, he was burned to the bone. Even though healed by St. Cyriacus, the governor still refused to believe.

The greatest miracle is when the saint, having been killed, is resurrected by God. Returning to confront his adversaries, he is again put to torture. St. Isidore was killed and brought back to life five times before his final martyrdom.

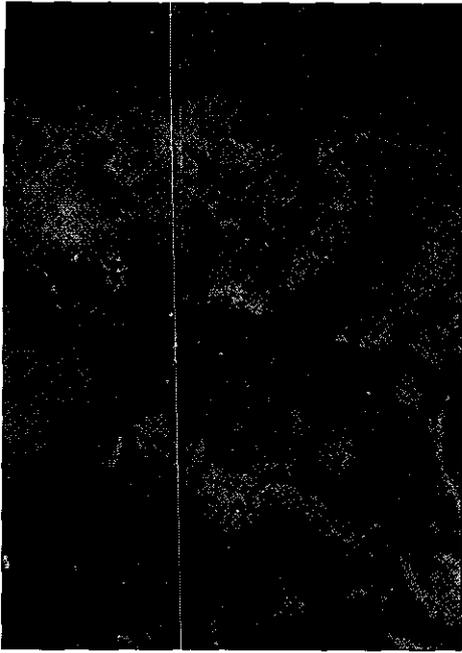
The heroic endurance of the martyrs frequently resulted in the mass conversion of pagan spectators. SS. Cyriacus and Julitta won 11,000 converts during their ordeal. The wife of Diocletian was among the 3,000 converts of St. George. Even Arianus, the cruelest of persecutors, eventually became a Christian.



St. George.

The lives of the saints usually concluded with accounts of their posthumous miracles. Martyrs are the soldiers of Christ, who are able to intercede on our behalf. So great is their power, that even their images can protect the faithful.

While the body of St. Menas was being transported to Egypt, the saint defended the ship from sea monsters. Later, the general in possession of the relics depicted the image of Menas on a wooden tablet, and "placed the icon on the saint's remains so that his blessing and power would remain in the likeness. The general then took the icon with him as protection not only at sea but wherever he went."



St. Theodore Stratelates.

The following saints are depicted in the wall paintings of the Cave Church of St. Paul. Most of them are found in the Dome of the Martyrs.

SS. CYRIACUS and JULITTA, a son and his mother, were martyred during the Great Persecution. When ordered to sacrifice, St. Julitta replied, "Ask a child of three if it is right to worship idols." Thereupon, her son eloquently reviled the false gods of the Empire. Under torture, St. Julitta's resolve began to weaken until St. Cyriacus showed to her a vision of paradise.

St. Cyriacus is the youngest Coptic martyr, but he is depicted as an adult on horseback in the Cave Church.

SS. APATER and EIRENE are also known as SS. Ter (or Abadir) and Herai (or Ira'i) in the Coptic tradition. They were the children of St. Basilides Stratelates of Antioch, and form part of his hagiographical cycle.

When Diocletian began to persecute Christians, St. Apater had a vision of an angel calling him to seek martyrdom with his sister. Their mother tried to prevent them from confessing their faith, but the saints were steadfast in their determination.

In order to spare her the agony of witnessing their execution, SS. Apater and Eirene sailed to Alexandria, where they hoped to die unrecognized among the numerous Egyptian martyrs. After a pilgrimage to the shrine St. Herai (Eirene's namesake), brother and sister were arrested and suffered martyrdom under Governor Arianus.



SS. Apater and Eirene.

ST. ABISKHIRUN of QALIN was a soldier under the command of Governor Arianus. When the saint refused to offer sacrifice, he was arrested and repeatedly tortured but an angel protected him from injury until his final martyrdom.

Arianus, his tormentor, was finally converted to Christianity after being healed of a wound by St. Philemon, one of his many victims. He was himself martyred towards the end of the Great Persecution and is venerated as a saint by the Coptic Church.

The depiction of St. Abiskhirun in the Dome of the Martyrs shows a man with a spear and four camels, which probably refers to one of the saint's posthumous miracles. At least three 18th-century Coptic icons employ the same iconographic image, but with the further addition of a church and a well.



St. Abiskhirun of Qalin.

ST. JAMES INTERCISUS was a third-century Christian nobleman, who was an advisor to the shah of Persia. When the shah unleashed a savage persecution against the Christians of his realm, St. James remained silent to protect his position at court. His mother and wife berated him for his lack of faith and refused to speak to him further. "If my own family treats me thus", he reflected, "what will be my judgment before God?"

Strengthened in his determination, St. James declared his belief before the shah. He was martyred by having his limbs cut off one by one, which is why his Arabic epithet is *al-Muqatta'* (the Sawn Asunder). His family built a shrine for the saint's remains in Persia, but when it was destroyed, his relics were transferred to Egypt.



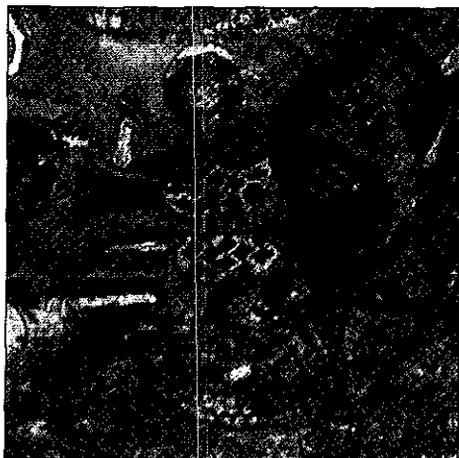
St. James Intercisus.

ST. MENAS the MIRACLE MAKER

was an Egyptian soldier stationed in Phrygia (modern Turkey), who retired from his regiment rather than assist in the persecution of Christians under Diocletian. Inspired by a heavenly vision, he professed his faith before the governor and was martyred.

Years later, after the conversion of Constantine, the relics of St. Menas were transferred to Egypt by his regiment. During the voyage, the saint protected the ship from sea monsters with long necks and camel heads. This is the miracle depicted in the Cave Church of St. Paul.

Once in Egypt, his remains were carried by camel to Mareotis, near Alexandria. When the animal refused to continue, it was interpreted as the martyr's wish to be buried at the site. Most icons of St. Menas show him as a standing soldier with two camels.



St. Menas the Miracle Maker.

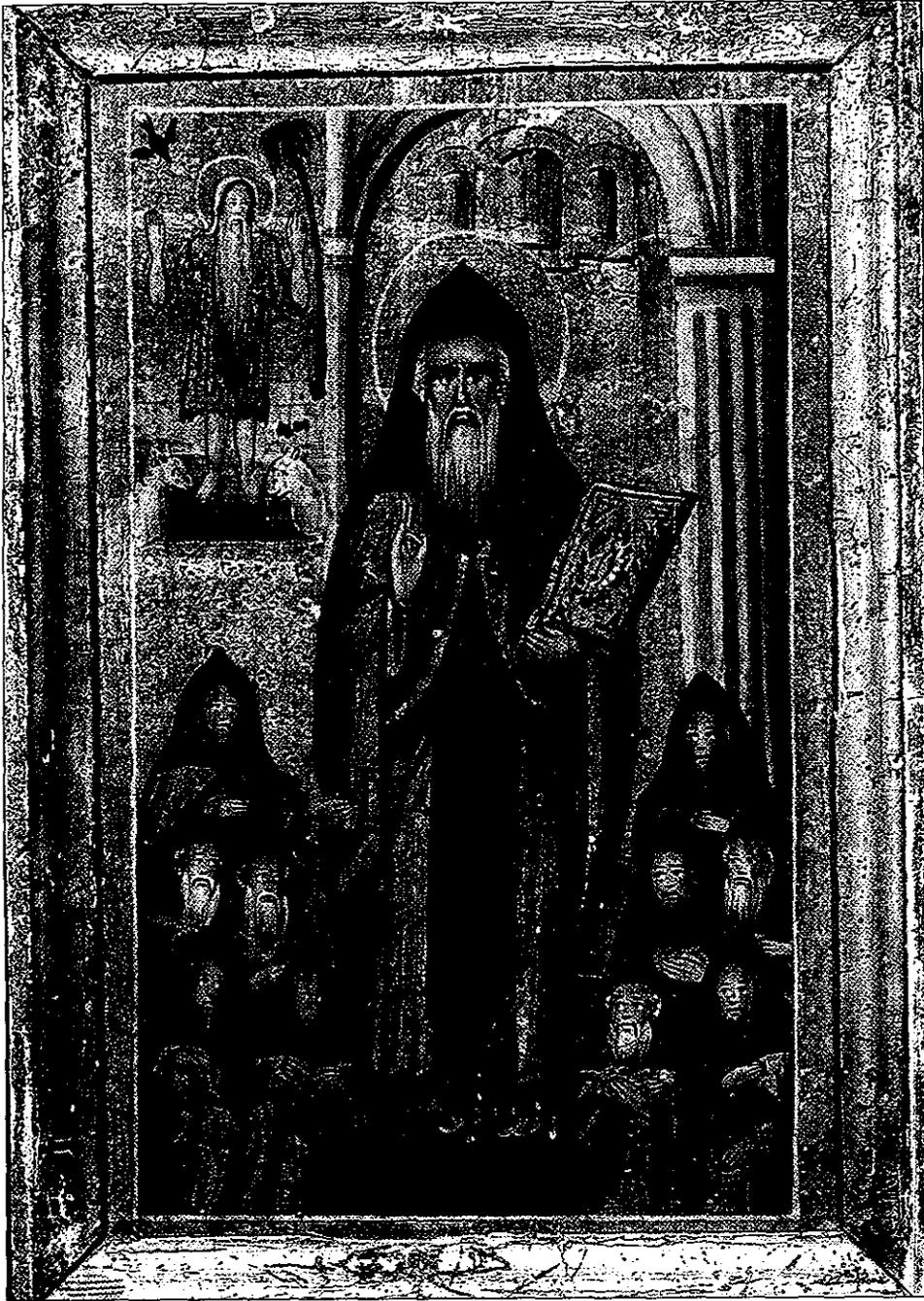
ST. THEODORE STRATELATES

may be depicted in the Dome of the Martyrs. He was an Egyptian soldier serving in Syria, who rose to the rank of general in a war against Persia. Once, while traveling in Asia Minor, he came to the town of Euchaites, just as the people were offering a Christian boy to a local dragon they worshiped. St. Theodore fought and slew the monster. The pagans of Euchaites denounced St. Theodore, who was arrested and martyred during the Great Persecution.

The image of the dragon-slaying equestrian in the Dome of the Martyrs has also been identified as St. Julius of Aqfahs. This seems unlikely. St. Julius, the historian of the martyrs, is usually shown in Coptic icons holding a book and a pen. The image in the dome may represent another St. Theodore, called the Oriental.



St. Theodore the Oriental?



St. Antony preaching to his monks.

St. Paul is shown in the upper left corner.

"So Antony, wishing to substitute martyrdom for a discipline which led to a similar reward, consecrated himself to the service of God, and introduced the monastic life among Christians." - al-Maqrizi (d. 1441)

THE DESERT FATHERS

During the era of persecution, martyrdom was held to be the highest state of grace. The conversion of Emperor Constantine brought peace to the Church, but did not eliminate the Christian quest for spiritual perfection.

St. Clement of Alexandria (d.215) was the first to suggest that the life of the ascetic was equal to that of the martyr. "Every soul", he wrote, "that has lived purely in the knowledge of God is a martyr both in life and in word, pouring out its faith like blood, throughout its whole life."

This argument was reinforced by Origen (d.254), who believed martyrdom could be of the spirit rather than of the body. A life of celibacy, poverty, self-abasement and rejection of the world, enabled Christians to ascend a ladder of perfection towards God. Spiritual imitation of martyrdom lay at the heart of the monastic movement, which arose in Egypt in the aftermath of the Great Persecution.

St. Paul the Hermit was the first to choose the desert as an appropriate setting for spiritual martyrdom. For more than ninety years he resided in the barren foothills by the Red Sea practicing what became known as the angelic life.

It is St. Antony the Great (251-356), however, who is revered as the Father of Monasticism. He was born to a prosperous peasant family a year after St. Paul withdrew into the desert.

When still a young man, he followed literally the advice of Jesus: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and come follow me and thou shall have treasures in Heaven."

St. Antony became the disciple of a hermit living on the outskirts of his village. He then set off on his own, moving to a rock-cut tomb on a mountainside. For ten years he was plagued by the temptations of devils and the visits of pilgrims.

Fleeing deeper into the desert, Antony settled in an abandoned Roman fort on the trade route between the Nile and the Red Sea. Over the next twenty years he attracted disciples. In circa 305, he organized his followers into the first monastic community.

Seeking greater solitude, St. Antony joined a bedouin caravan, "and having journeyed with them three days and three nights in the desert, came to a lofty mountain, at the foot of which ran a clear spring. St. Antony fell in love with the spot as if it had been offered to him by God." He lived at Mount Qulzum, his inner mountain, for the last forty years of his life.

During the worst phase of the Great Persecution, Antony left the desert for Alexandria. "He longed for martyrdom, but the Lord was keeping him that he might teach many the practice of asceticism that he had learned from the Scriptures. Many merely on seeing him were eager to imitate his manner of life."

He soon had many imitators. In about 320, St. Ammon (d.353), a friend of St. Antony's, settled in the desert of Nitria, west of the Delta. At the same time, St. Macarius (d.390) established a community at Scetis (Wadi al-Natrun), and St. Pachomius (d.345) founded his first cenobitic (communal) monastery in Upper Egypt.

Soon, monasteries for men and others for women were built outside of practically every town and village in Egypt. It is said that there were 5,000 monks at Nitria alone, each living in a separate cell.

The desert grew so crowded that St. Ammon, following the advice of St. Antony, established a second community, known as Kellia (the Cells), deeper in the desert. It served as a place of greater solitude for more experienced monks. Nevertheless, by the end of the century, there were 600 monks at Kellia.

The angelic life adopted by the

Desert Fathers had as its goal the purification of the monk's soul. To be worthy of such a reward required years of hardship and self-denial.

Monks labored alone in their cells, gathering together only for weekly meals and worship. They followed an *abba* (father), who was a more experienced monk. He instructed them in spiritual discipline and survival in the desert.

Although there were no formal monastic rules, young monks were guided by the example of their elders. St. Antony once said, "A monk ought to tell his elders how many steps he takes and how many drops of water he drinks in his cell, in case he is in error about it."

The collected sayings of the Desert Fathers, the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, forms a textbook on monastic life. The advice of the great spiritual hermits is profound but practical. When asked how a monk should live, St. Antony answered, "Do not trust in your own righteousness, do not worry about the past, but control your tongue and your stomach."

St. Arsenius (d.449) once said, "Strive with all your might to bring your interior activity into accord with God, and you will overcome exterior passions."



*The desert in the vicinity of the Monastery of St. Paul.
In the foreground is the outer gate of the monastery.
In the distance is the Red Sea and the Sinai peninsula.*

ST. MACARIUS the GREAT was one of the pioneers of Egyptian monasticism. In about 330, he became the first to settle in the desert of Scetis. Within twenty-five years, the area was crowded with monks. He founded the two monasteries of St. Macarius and Baramus, which are still active in the Wadi al-Natrun today.

St. Macarius said, "Do no evil to anyone, and do not judge anyone. Observe this and you will be saved."

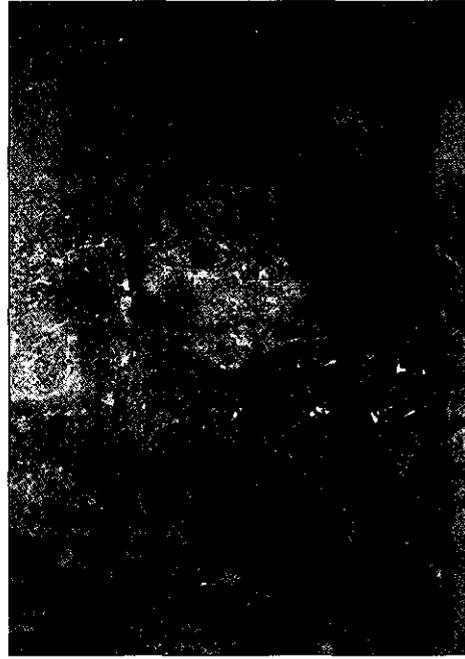
Abba Macarius once returned to his cell and found a thief loading his things onto a camel. So he helped him, saying, "We have brought nothing into this world, and we cannot take anything out."

SS. MAXIMUS and DOMITIUS were the grandsons of Emperor Jovian. Wishing to be monks, they went to St. Macarius in Scetis. Seeing that they had been raised in comfort, he tried to dissuade them from a life in the desert, but they persisted. He therefore showed them how to build a cell, saying, "Cut out some stones here, and bring some wood from the marsh, and make a roof." He also showed them how to make baskets, which they could exchange for bread.

After three years, Abba Macarius visited them and found that they had become perfect monks. When the young men died soon afterwards, he founded a monastery, which he named Baramus (the Romans) in their honor.



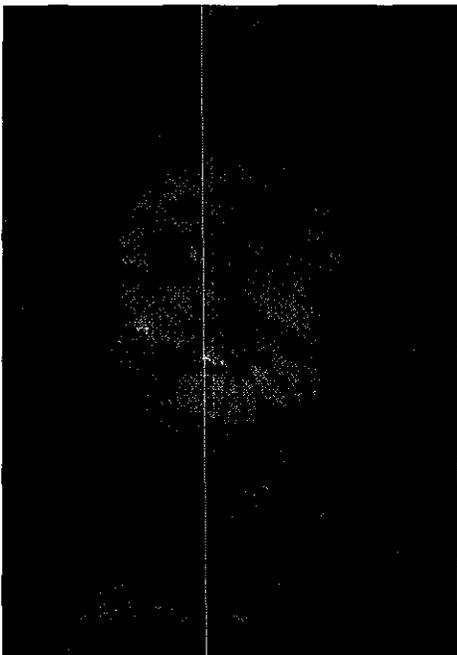
Unidentified Monk (Cave Church).



St. Domitius (Cave Church).

ST. MOSES the BLACK, or the Ethiopian, was a former slave, who lived as a robber until he met Abba Macarius in the Wadi al-Natrun. He then became a monk, and was eventually ordained as a priest. In 407, St. Moses was martyred along with six of his disciples during the first Berber sack of Scetis.

"A brother at Scetis committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited. He took a leaking jug, filled it with water and carried it with him, saying, "My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, yet today I am coming to judge the errors of another." When they heard that they said no more to the brother but forgave him."



St. Moses the Black (Cave Church).

ST. MARINA, the Woman Monk, assumed male attire and entered a monastery, where she was known as Marinus. She was once expelled from the monastery after being falsely accused of fathering a son on a village girl. For three years, Marina cared for the child outside the monastery. The other monks begged their superior to readmit her, because of her obvious piety and penitence. Permission was granted for her to return. She remained a monk for forty years. The child was raised in the monastery, and in time became a monk. It was only after her death that it was discovered that Marina was a woman and innocent of the charge brought against her.



St. Marina (Cave Church).

ST. JOHN the LITTLE, or the Dwarf, is said to have had all of Scetis hanging from his finger because of his humility. He had many disciples and founded a monastery in the Wadi al-Natrun, which was active until the 15th century.

As a young monk, he was the disciple of Abba Ammoes, who once took a piece of dry wood and planted it, saying to John, "Water it every day, until it bears fruit." Now the water was so far away that he had to leave in the evening and return the following morning. At the end of three years the wood came to life and bore fruit. Then Abba Ammoes took the fruit to the church saying to the brethren, "Take and eat the fruit of obedience."

ST. ARSENIUS was the tutor of the sons of Emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395). When the emperor died, he fled the court in Constantinople and traveled secretly to Egypt, where he became the disciple of St. John the Little in Scetis. As a monk he was renowned for his austerity and silence.

"It was said of him that his cell was thirty-two miles away and that he did not readily leave it."

"It was also said of him that on Saturday evenings, preparing for the glory of Sunday, he would turn his back on the sun and stretch out his hands in prayer towards the heavens, till once again the sun shone in his face. Then he would sit down."



Unidentified Saint, SS. Arsenius, Abib, (above) Shenouda and Bishoi.

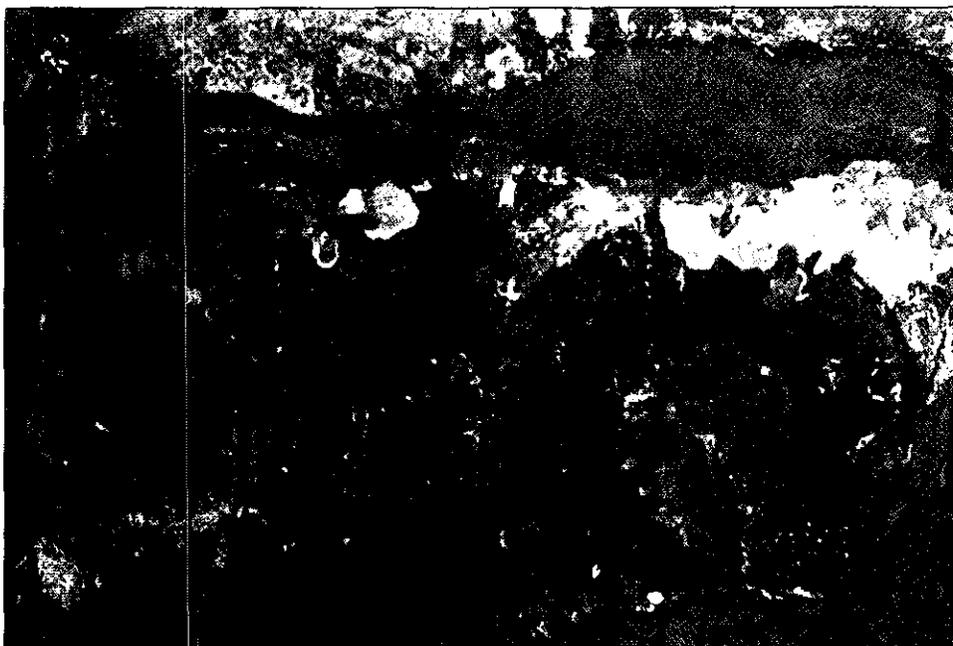
ST. BISHOI is referred to as “the just, the perfect, the beloved of our Good Savior” in the Coptic liturgy. His icons show him washing the feet of Jesus. Abba Bishoi was a friend of St. John the Little. When Scetis grew crowded, they separated and founded new communities. The Monastery of St. Bishoi in the Wadi al-Natrun is still functioning.

ST. APOLLO OF BAWIT withdrew from the world at the age of eighteen, and spent forty years in the desert. “When he was eighty years old he established a great monastery of five hundred perfect men, almost all of them with the power to work miracles.”

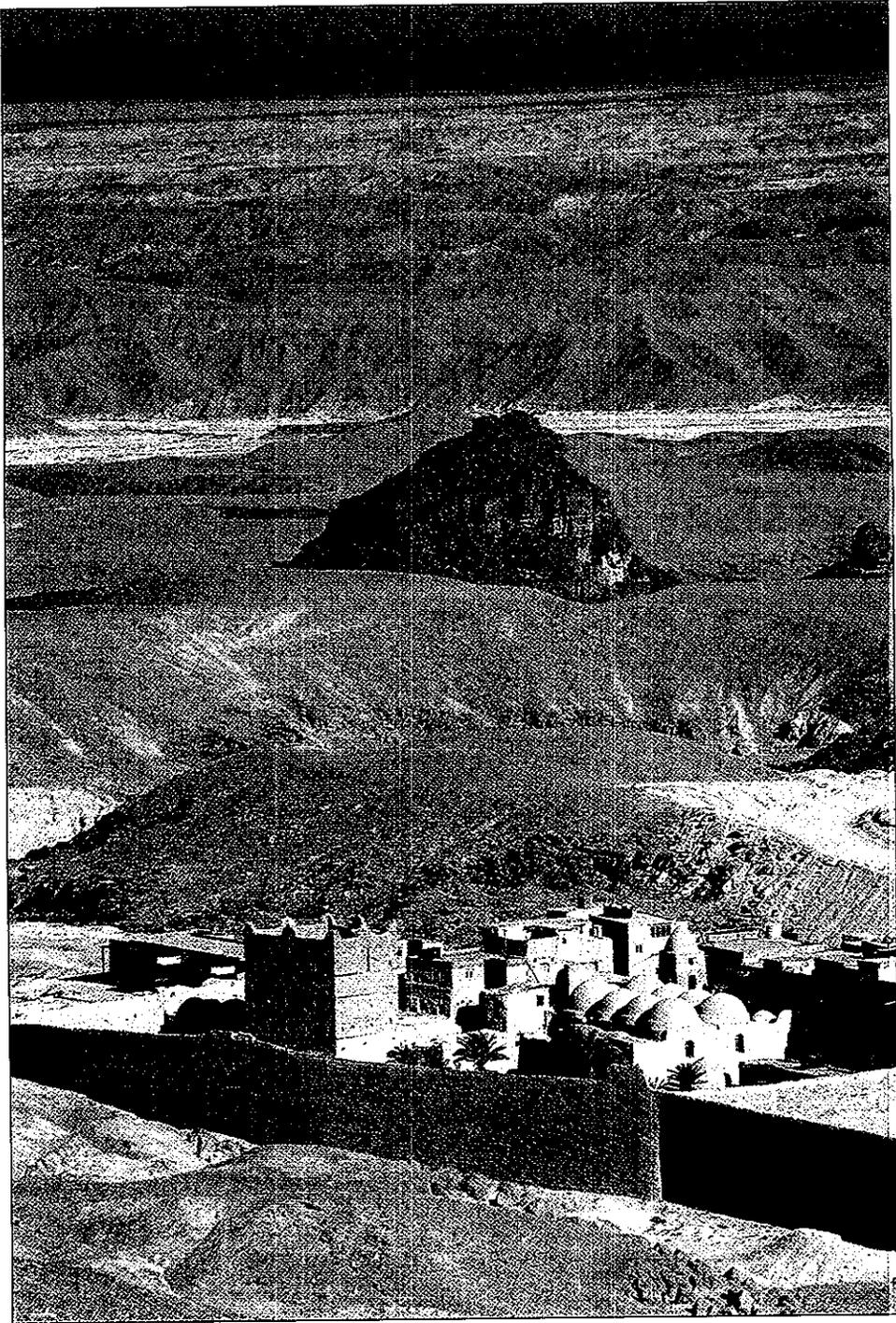
ST. SHENOUDA was the abbot of the White Monastery in Akhmim. Under his guidance, it became one of the largest cenobitic (*life-in-common*) communities in Egypt, containing 2,200 monks and 1,800 nuns.

The influence of St. Shenouda extended far beyond the White Monastery. His letters and sermons helped establish the Sahidic dialect of the Coptic language as the standard literary idiom of Christian Egypt.

In 431, St. Shenouda attended the Council of Ephesus with St. Cyril. In acknowledgement of his support of orthodoxy, the patriarch granted him the rank of *archimandrite*, a term derived from the Greek *archein*, to rule, and *mandra*, a fold.



St. Apollo and St. John the Little from the Cave Church.



"Within the desert is the Monastery of St. Paul. It stands in the Wadi al-'Araba, near the pool of Miriam. It is near Mount Sinai, but divided from it by the passage over the Red Sea." - Abu al-Makarim (c. 1171)

HISTORY OF THE MONASTERY OF ST. PAUL

The Monastery of St. Paul, located deep in the eastern desert, has always been far removed from the turbulent affairs of the world. Until recently, it took four days to reach the monastery from the Nile.

Through the ages, pilgrims and other visitors have made the difficult journey. Their accounts enable us to piece together a sketchy history.

Within fifty years of the death of St. Paul, his cave had become an international pilgrimage site. It is first mentioned, circa 400, by Sulpicius Severus of Aquitania. He tells of a journey made by a fellow countryman to Egypt, which included a visit to "the place where the blessed hermit Paul had his abode." The saint's renown had probably already attracted a community of monks to live around his hermitage.

After the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the emperor appointed a patriarch to the see of St. Mark. The Copts rejected his authority, and elected a pope of their own.

The monasteries of Egypt became strongholds of Coptic orthodoxy and the focus of popular devotion.

They supplied most of the higher clergy of the Coptic Church. Under Peter IV (567-69), the thirty-fourth patriarch, there were "600 flourishing monasteries, like beehives in their populousness."

The Monastery of St. Paul originally consisted of scattered dwellings in the desert. The monks lived alone, coming together only on Saturday and Sunday for worship and a communal meal. The earliest church was in the cave of St. Paul. A refectory, built somewhat later, would have been nearby.

The remoteness of the site made it susceptible to the attack of bedouin. In the fifth century, monasteries across Egypt began erecting fortified towers, where the monks could find safety from marauders.

It is not known when the first keep was built at the Monastery of St. Paul. The monks of St. Antony date theirs to the reign of Justinian (527-565), the emperor who fortified the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mount Sinai.

An anonymous pilgrim from Placentia, who "came through the desert to the cave of the blessed Paul", circa 570, makes no mention of fortifications. He noted only the spring, which he said "waters the whole area."

The Arab conquest of 641 brought an end to Roman rule in Egypt. The Arabs had no experience in managing the complex agricultural system upon which the wealth of Egypt derived. They depended on the Copts, who were to staff their fiscal administration for centuries.

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, said "The Copts are the noblest of foreigners; the gentlest of them in action; the most excellent of them in character." Most Arab governors treated the Copts and the Church with respect. The wild bedouin of the desert, however, respected no one.

In the ninth century, the monks of Egypt started building walls around their monasteries as protec-

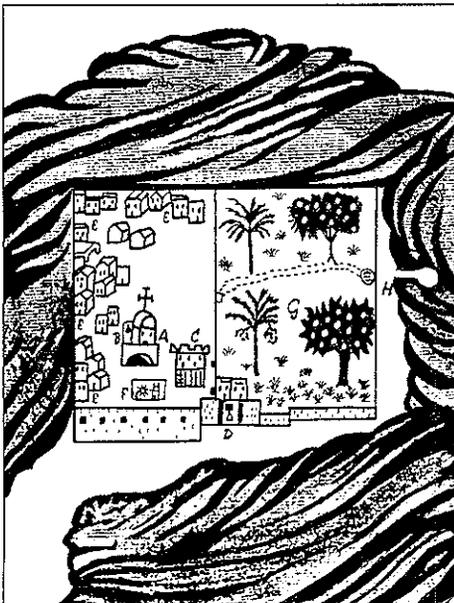
tion against the bedouin. The two Red Sea Monasteries of St. Paul and St. Antony may have been fortified earlier because of their remoteness.

The chronicler Abu al-Makarim (mistakenly identified as Abu Salih) wrote a *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt* in the last days of the Fatimid Caliphate. The Fatimids (969-1171) had shown great favor to the Copts, and Abu al-Makarim mentions nearly two hundred active monasteries.

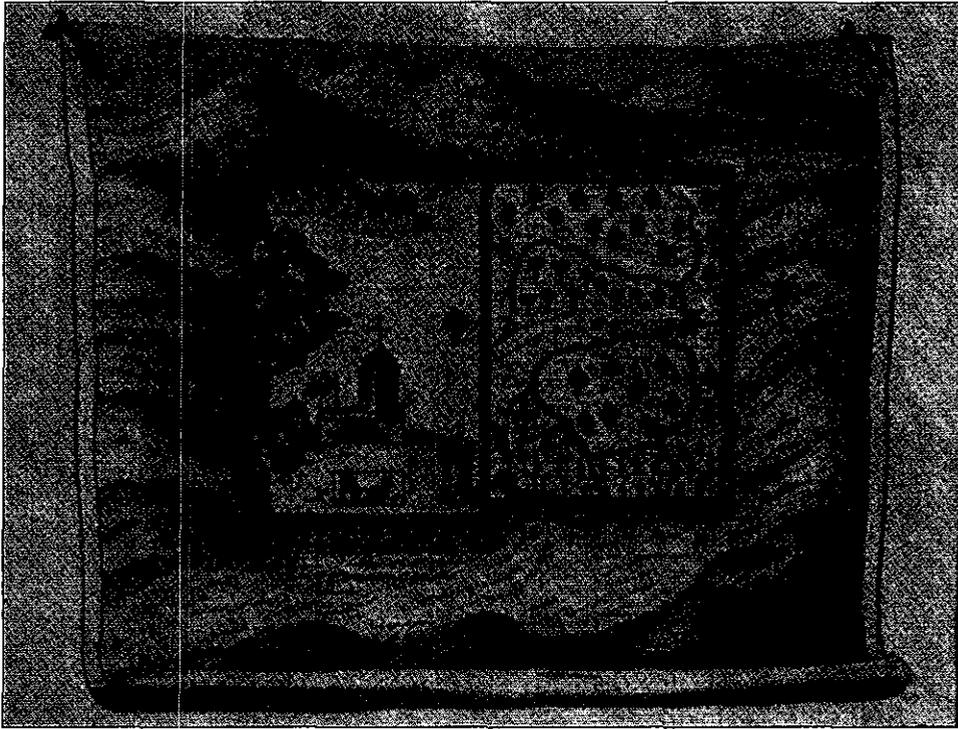
He describes the Monastery of St. Antony as being "surrounded by a fortified wall. It contains many monks. There is a large garden and three springs. In it stands a well-built keep. There is nothing like it among the monasteries of Egypt."

Abu al-Makarim says little about the Monastery of St. Paul. He notes that it is "within the desert near the pool of Miriam," but probably never made the journey himself.

"Monks in priests' orders," he writes, "come from the Monastery of St. Antony to this monastery to celebrate the liturgy in it by turns." Until the 19th century, a single abbot was head of both monasteries. The more experienced monks lived in the harsher solitude of St. Paul's. Younger monks were sometimes sent there for spiritual training.



*Monastery of St. Paul in 1716,
after Claude Sicard.*



*Monastery of St. Paul from "A Description of the East" by R. Pococke (1743).
A. Cave Church B. Bell Tower C. Keep D. Fatuli E. Cells F. Mill G. Garden H. Spring.*

The earliest known wall paintings in the Cave Church of St. Paul seem to be contemporary with the work of the artist Theodore, active in 1232-1233 at the Monastery of St. Antony. A century later, new paintings were added to the church.

In 1395, Ogier de Saint-Chéron, a French pilgrim, counted sixty monks at the monastery, who were "of the same habit, rite and piety as the brotherhood of St. Antony." Soon afterwards, the historian al-Maqrizi called it the 'Monastery of the Tigers' in his survey of the eighty-six Coptic monasteries functioning in the early 15th century.

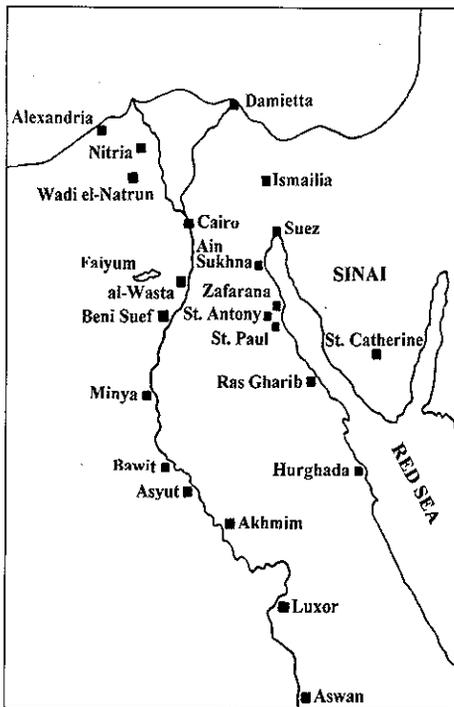
In 1486, the *Geographica* of Bernhard von Breydenbach was one of the first maps to show St. Paul's in its correct position by the Red Sea. Ironically, bedouin had sacked the monastery two years earlier.

It remained in ruins until Gabriel VII (1525-1568), the 95th Patriarch, repopulated it with ten monks from Upper Egypt. A second devastation in 1582 left the Monastery of St. Paul desolate for more than a century.

In 1638, Jean Coppin, French consul in Damietta, visited the abandoned monastery and wrote a description of the Cave Church.

GETTING TO THE MONASTERY OF ST. PAUL

The Monastery of St. Paul is located about 244 meters above sea level in the sandstone foothills of the South Galala Plateau. The steep limestone cliffs of the plateau run parallel to the Gulf of Suez, reaching a maximum elevation of 1465 meters. Georg Schweinfurth, in 1877, described the environment of St. Paul's as "a terrible wilderness of mountainous country." Henry Tattam, in 1839, remarked that the monastery "is enclosed by lofty mountains, and appears inaccessible to all but the natives of the desert."



The plateau is cut by the Wadi al-'Araba, which runs from the coast at Zafarana to the Nile near Beni Suef. The 'Araba Valley has been a major trade route since antiquity. Not only did it allow easy access to the Red Sea, but also the springs in the area ensured a plentiful supply of water. In the 15th century, Maqrizi noted that the Monastery St. Paul "lies near a spring of water where travelers halt."

St. Antony discovered his 'inner mountain' by taking this route with a bedouin caravan, a three-day journey from the Nile. St. Paul may have found his cave in the same way.

Until recently, visitors to the monastery had to sail up the Nile to Beni Suef, then hire camels for the trek across the desert. They would usually stop first at the Monastery of St. Antony located on the northern scarp of the South Galala Plateau, facing the Wadi al-'Araba. They would then either cross the plateau to the Monastery of St. Paul on the other side (a walk of 25 km., taking about eight hours), or they would ride camels by way of the coast, a distance of 86 km.

Since the construction of the Red Sea road between Suez and Ras Gharb in 1946, "the wild spot on which St. Paul is situated" has become easily accessible.



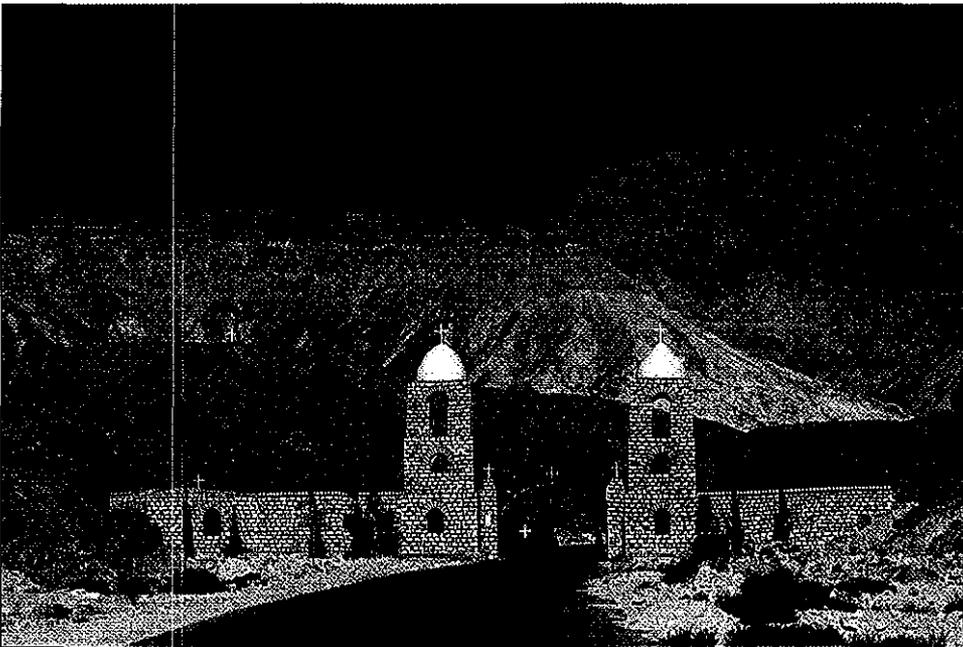
Today, the most direct route to the monastery from Cairo is by way of the Qatamia - 'Ain Sukhna Road (east of Maadi). There is a drive of about 120 km. to the Red Sea coast. You may also take the Suez Road from Heliopolis, but be sure to turn south after 85 km. for 'Ain Sukhna.

From 'Ain Sukhna follow the coastal road to Zafarana (83 km.), which runs between the desert peaks

of the North Galala Plateau and the blue waters of the Gulf of Suez.

At the lighthouse station at Zafarana there is a low budget hotel, the Sahara Inn, which has a café and a filling station. Just to the south is the turn off for the neighboring Monastery of St. Antony. This road follows the Wadi al-'Araba back to the Nile valley at Beni Suef and al-Wasta.

Continue south from Zafarana (past the five-star Windsor Hotel) for about 28 km. The turn for the Monastery of St. Paul is marked. Drive into the desert for 10 km until you reach the outer gate. The road then twists its way through low sandstone hills, until the monastery suddenly appears around the last corner.



The outer gate of the Monastery of St. Paul.

WALLS

The Desert Fathers lived in caves and small huts, which were isolated from each other in the desert. The threat of nomads, however, compelled monks to form tighter communities. Between the fifth and ninth centuries, the monasteries of Egypt were gradually fortified for reasons of security.

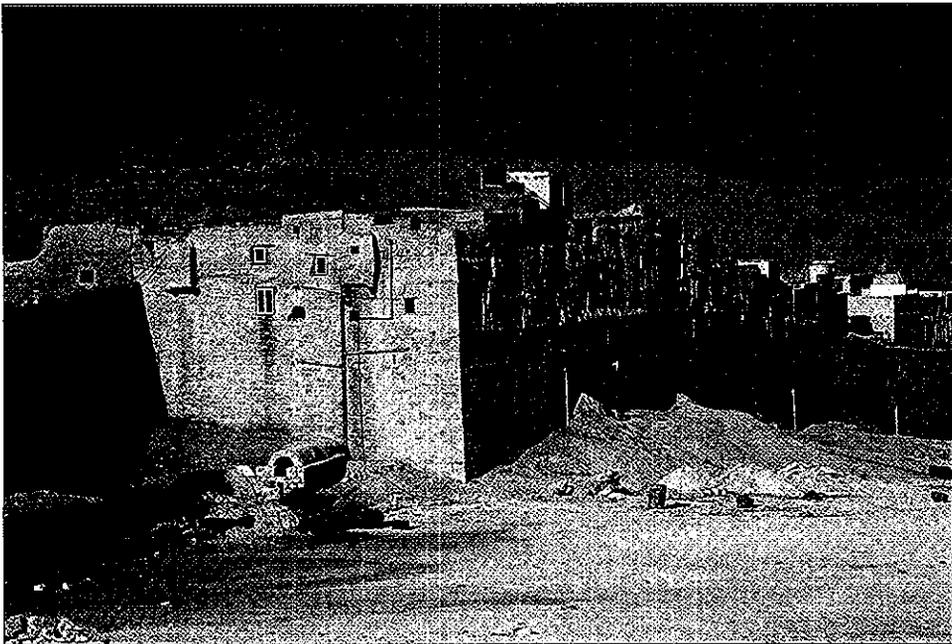
The stone walls that surround the Monastery of St. Paul are made of local sandstone. The western wall still has its original ramparts, which are reached by an open stairway from the garden. Cells have been built on top of the eastern wall.

These fortifications have been enlarged and rebuilt many times. The date of their original construction is

presently unknown. The earliest walls of the monastery were probably built sometime between the Justinianic fortifications at Mount Sinai (c.530) and the walls of Pope Shenouda I in the Wadi al-Natrun (c.870).

The Monastery of St. Paul was pillaged by bedouin in 1484. It was restored by Gabriel VII (1525-1568), only to be sacked again in 1582. It lay abandoned, until the monastery was repopulated in 1701 by John XVI. After every devastation, the walls of the monastery were repaired.

The last attack by the bedouin occurred in 1805. The marauders were unable to penetrate the walls, but they did stop supply caravans coming from the Nile valley from reaching the monastery.

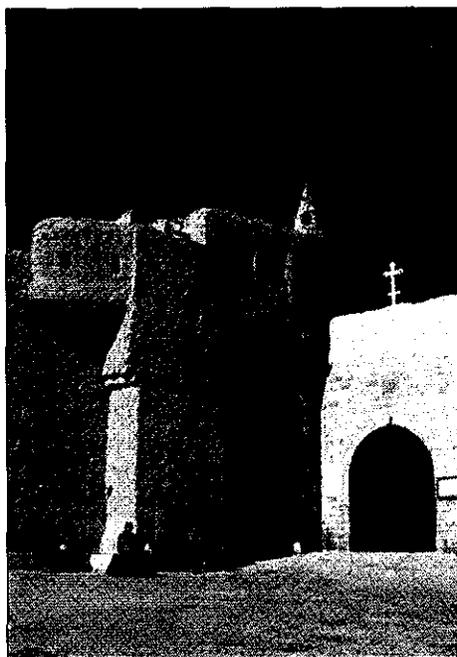


FATULI and MA'TAMA

As a further security precaution, the Monastery of St. Paul did not have a ground level entrance until the early 20th century. Visitors rang a bell to notify the monks of their arrival. A trap door in the floor of a projecting room on top of the walls was opened, and a hoop, secured by rope netting, was lowered to haul them up. The rope lift is known as a *Fatuli*, a word of uncertain origin. It was operated by a large winch in the upper room, which could be turned by a single man.

In 1904, Agnes Smith Lewis became one of the first women to enter the monastery. After a short stay, she departed by way of the *Fatuli*, "The windlass was turned, I closed my eyes, and just as I opened them to ascertain if I had begun to descend, I found myself on mother earth."

Next to the *Fatuli* is a smaller rope lift called the *Ma'tama*, Arabic for 'food source'. It lowered gifts of food to the bedouin outside the walls. Henry Tattam observed in 1839 that "the natives of the desert are in the habit of going thither to demand food." The *Ma'tama* was used also for food deliveries. It is connected by a shaft to the *Diksar*, the storage hall of the monastery.



*Ma'tama (left), Fatuli (open window),
bell tower and modern gate.*



*"They pulled us up with a pulley to a
window, which serves as a door."
Claude Sicard (1716)*



The Keep is made of sandstone with lime mortar. The walls are reinforced with timber stretchers. The roof is thatched on palm logs, as are all the upper levels. Only the lower two floors have vaulted ceilings.

KEEP

Keeps were the earliest fortifications built by the monks of Egypt. They served as towers of refuge when nomads attacked monastic communities. The first known examples date from the fourth and fifth centuries.

The Keep at the Monastery of St. Paul is made of sandstone. It has four stories, as well as an open roof and a subterranean cistern. There is no entrance at ground level. Access is by way of a drawbridge on the second floor. When lowered, the bridge crosses to the roof of the Church of St. Mercurius. A winch on the third floor can raise it if danger threatens.

Each level has between four and seven rooms, one of which contains the staircase. A small room on the third floor has a storage bin for bread. The loaves were preserved hard until soaked in water.

The fourth floor contains a small Church of the Virgin Mary. The dedication is unusual, since most keeps in Coptic monasteries have churches of St. Michael the Protector. This is the only keep church dedicated to the Holy Virgin.

The roof is the largest space in the Keep. Crenellations protected the monks in times of attack.

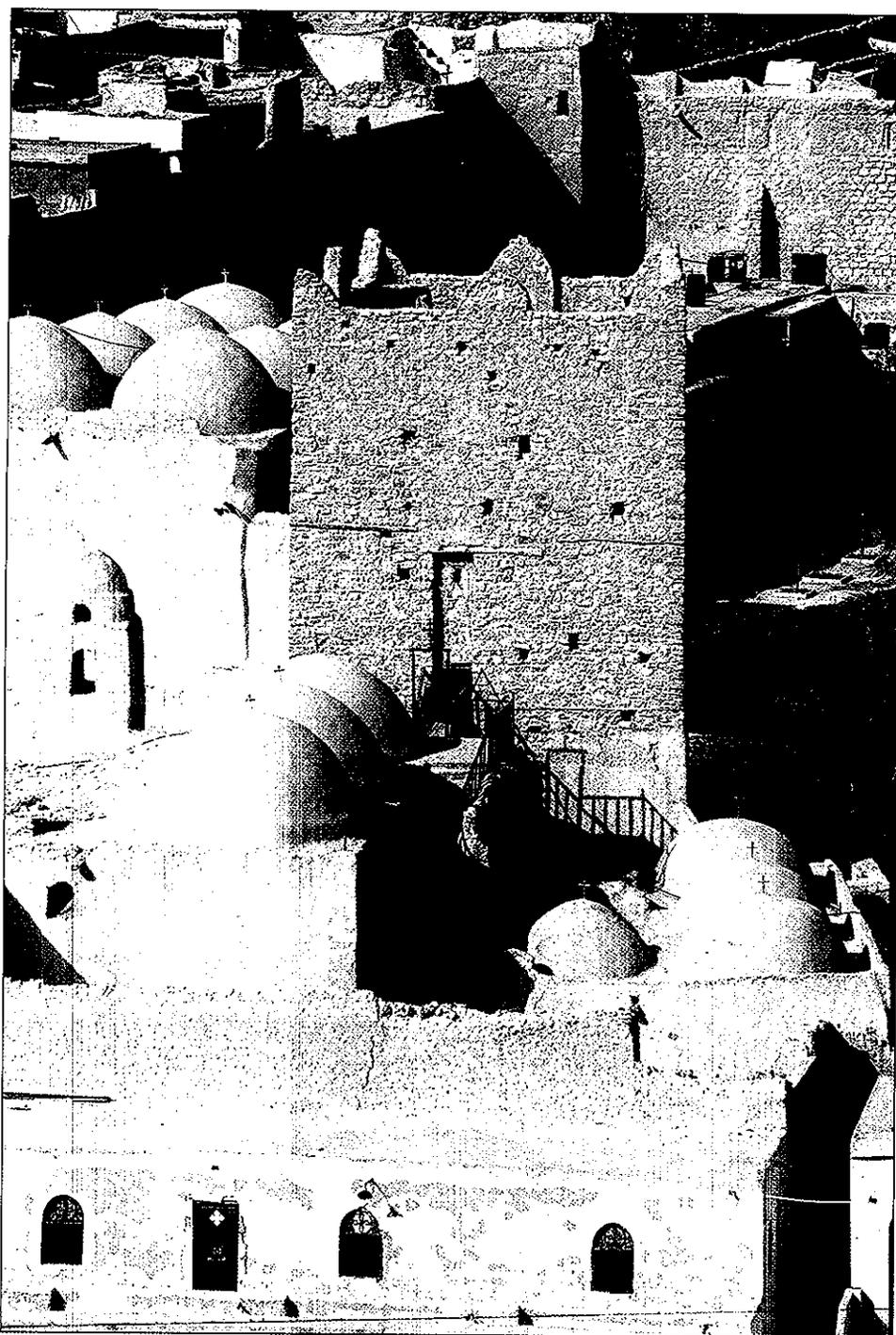


Wooden object (currently in the Keep).

Secret of the Crows by Otto Meinardus:

"Many years ago, a small wooden bowl with two tiny crows carved on it was removed from the Monastery of St. Paul; a monk had taken it, and without knowing what he had done, he brought the charm to the Monastery of St. Antony. As the monk, carrying the bowl, entered the gate, all the crows which had been living in the immediate vicinity of the monastery left southward and settled in and around the Monastery of St. Paul.

"The monks of St. Paul were furious and demanded the immediate return of the protective charm. When the monks of St. Antony complied with the demands of their brethren, the crows left St. Paul's monastery, except for two crows. Still to this day there are only two crows at the monastery."



The Cave Church of St. Paul (lower right), the Church of St. Mercurius (lower left), the Church of St. Michael (upper left), and the Church of the Virgin Mary in the Keep (center).

COPTIC CHURCHES

The earliest Coptic churches were basilicas. They had wooden roofs supported by two rows of arches resting on columns. The arcades divided the interior into three aisles.

In the 11th century, vaulting began to replace wooden roofs in the churches of Egypt. Domes were constructed over the sanctuaries of older basilicas. Newer churches were roofed entirely by clusters of domes. Whenever a church is depicted in a medieval Coptic painting it is shown as a domed building.

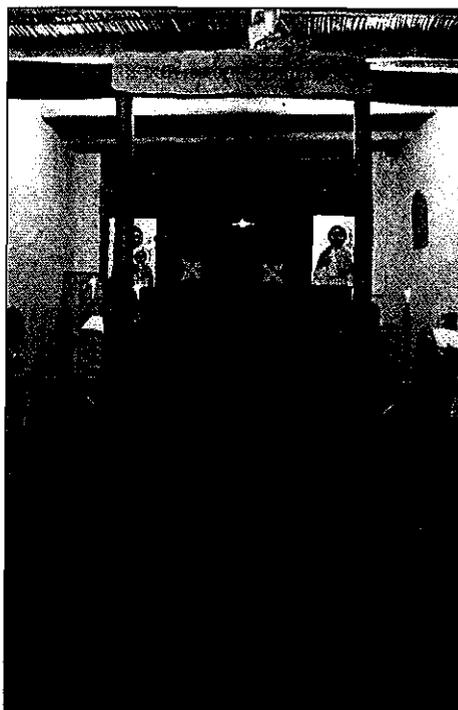
There are four churches at the Monastery of St. Paul; domes cover three of them. Only the tiny Church of the Virgin in the Keep is without vaulting. Even the Cave Church of St. Paul has been enlarged by the addition of four domed chambers.

The Church of St. Michael and the Church of St. Mercurius also have bell towers. The ringing of bells announces the times of worship, and thus sets the rhythm of monastic life.

Coptic churches are divided into two distinct areas, the nave and the sanctuary. The nave comprises the main body of the church. It is the place assigned to the laity, who attend the liturgy as onlookers.

The sanctuary, or *haykal*, is at the eastern end of the church. It is a small room containing a freestanding altar. Coptic churches usually have more than one *haykal* aligned side by side, each with its own dedication. One of the sanctuary rooms may be used as a vestry, in which case it will not contain an altar.

The sanctuary is separated from the nave by a continuous wooden screen, known as a *higab* (veil). It contains doors leading into the individual *haykals*. The screen is usually surmounted by a row of icons. Lamps and ostrich eggs may also be suspended before the *higab*.



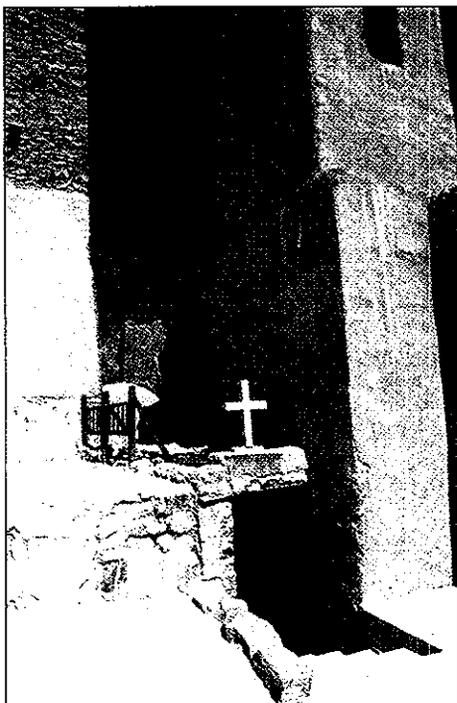
Church of the Virgin in the Keep .

CAVE CHURCH OF ST. PAUL

The Cave Church is the spiritual heart of the monastery. It occupies the site of the hermitage of St. Paul.

The original cave was probably a natural cavern. Nothing is known about its size or proportions when it was inhabited by St. Paul. The earliest recorded pilgrims, who visited the site in the fifth and sixth centuries, have left no descriptions.

Even the location of the mouth of the cave is uncertain. It seems likely, however, that it was near the current entrance of the church.



Entrance to the Cave Church.

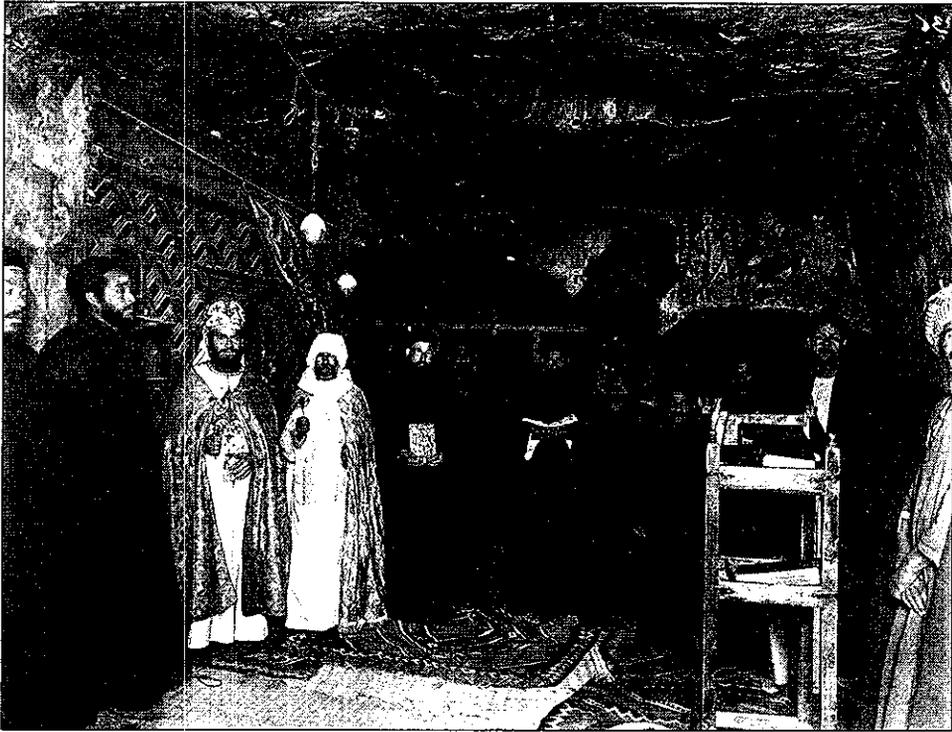
The cave must have been functioning as a chapel soon after the death of St. Paul. It was gradually transformed into an underground church as new chambers were cut into the rock. The original entrance of the cave was enlarged, then enclosed by the construction of additional rooms.

The oldest section of the church consists of two subterranean chambers, forming a sanctuary (*haykal*) dedicated to St. Paul, and a small nave containing his cenotaph. These rooms are believed to have been part of the original cave.

Some time later, new rooms were carved into the rock creating an enlarged nave, a second *haykal* dedicated to St. Antony, and an underground corridor with a flight of rock-cut stairs ascending into the 18th-century Church of St. Mercurius.

The sanctuary of St. Antony is covered by a small brick dome, which rises above the roof of the cave. Within this *haykal* are the earliest surviving wall paintings of the church. They date from the 13th and 14th centuries.

In 1638, Jean Coppin gave the earliest description of the Cave Church. "The church is embedded twelve to thirteen feet under the earth. Nevertheless, it is not a cavern



*The Cave Church of St. Paul, photographed in 1931 by the Whittemore expedition.
Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC.*

but a building composed of walls with vaulted roofing. This church, which is not very large, is much longer than it is wide. The entrance is in the middle of its length, and its other end terminates in three altars disposed in the form of a cross."

Although Coppin's remarks are at times obscure, he is clear that the church had three *haykals*. The third sanctuary must have been added before 1582, when bedouin sacked the monastery. His reference to the altars being arranged in the form of a cross probably means they were aligned side by side. The third *haykal* most likely

occupied the site of the current sanctuary of the Twenty-Four Elders.

In the beginning of the 18th century, John XVI (1676-1718) restored the Cave Church. Three domed rooms were built along the northwestern side. These chambers are not carved into the rock, but constructed of stone blocks. The western-most room contains a staircase, which is now the entrance of the church. The two adjoining rooms form an extension of the nave and a *haykal* of the Twenty-Four Elders. When the work was completed, a monk of the monastery added new wall paintings throughout the church.

WALL PAINTINGS OF THE CAVE CHURCH

A. Dome of the Martyrs

Stairwell:

1. St. Victor of Assiut, martyr
2. St. Theodore Stratelates, martyr
3. St. George, martyr

Dome:

4. St. Theodore the Oriental? martyr
5. SS. Apater and Eirene, martyrs
6. St. Isidore of Antioch, martyr
7. St. Abiskhirun of Qalin, martyr
8. St. James al-Muqatta , martyr
9. St. Menas, martyr

B. Nave (north)

10. St. Gabriel, archangel
11. St. Suriel, archangel
12. St. Raphael, archangel
13. St. Michael, archangel
14. St. Sarapion, bishop
15. St. Antony, father of monks
16. St. Paul, first hermit
17. St. Eirene, martyr
18. St. Marina, woman-monk
19. St. Julitta, martyr
20. St. Cyriacus, martyr

C. Nave (center)

21. St. Marqus, monk
22. Virgin Mary (ceiling) *
23. Jesus Christ (ceiling) *
24. St. John the Baptist (ceiling) *
25. St. Maximus, monk
26. St. Domitius, monk
27. St. Macarius the Great, monk
28. Angel with child (ceiling) *
29. Two unidentified Saints (ceiling)*
30. St. Moses the Black, monk
31. Virgin and Child with Cherubim
32. SS. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael
33. Three Youths with Angel

D. Corridor

34. Unidentified monk
35. St. Arsenius, monk
36. St. Abib, monk
37. St. Apollo, monk
38. St. John the Little, monk
39. Unidentified monk
40. Unidentified monk
41. St. Bishoi, monk *
42. St. Shenouda, monk *
43. St. Samuel of Qalamun, monk
44. St. Julius, monk
45. Unidentified monk

E. Haykal of the Twenty-Four Elders

46. Christ Pantocrator with the Four Living Creatures
47. Seven Angels with Trumpets
48. Twenty-Four Elders

F. Haykal of St. Antony

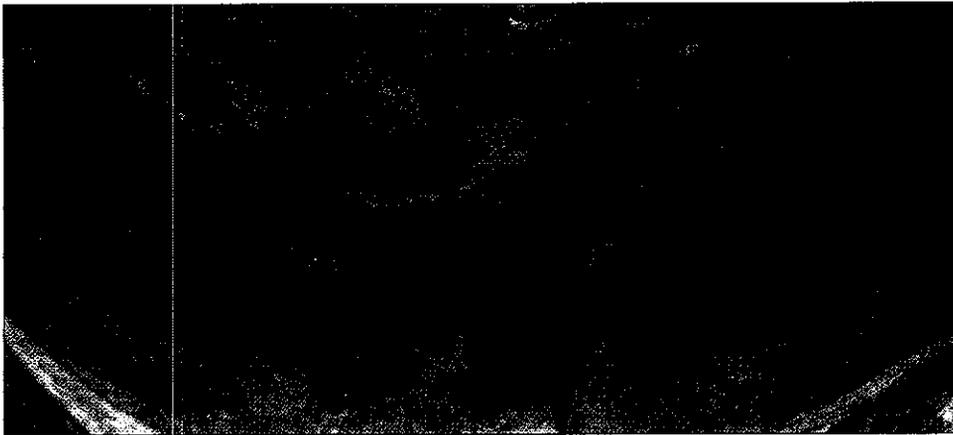
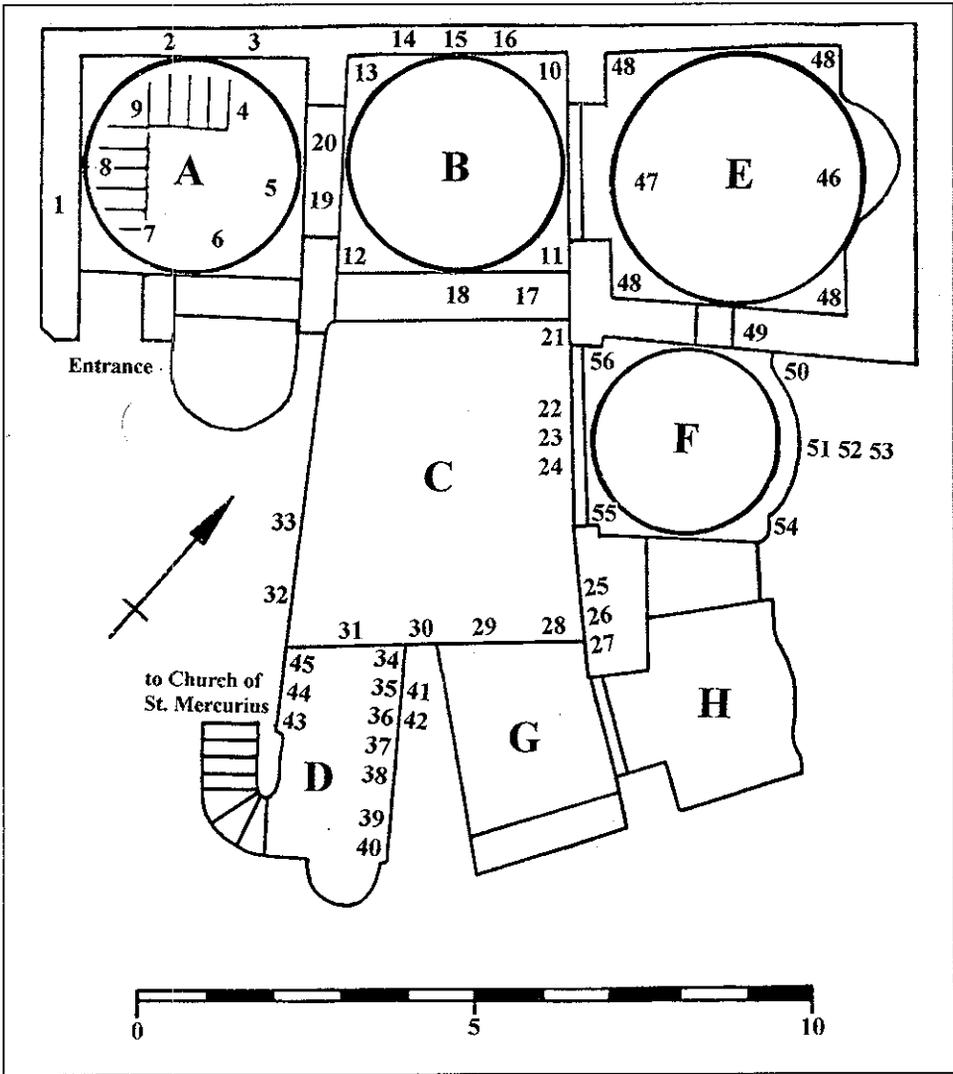
49. St. John the Evangelist (13th c.)
50. Angel (1334)
51. Christ Pantocrator with the Four Living Creatures (1334)
52. Annunciation: Virgin Mary and Archangel Gabriel (13th cent.)
53. Theotokos (Mother of God) with Two Angels (13th cent.)
54. Angel (1334)
55. Seraphim (1334)
56. Seraphim (1334)

G. Nave (south) and Cenotaph of St. Paul

H. Haykal of St. Paul

NB. All paintings are from c.1713 unless otherwise noted.

* = Painting from the 13th or 14th century.



WALL PAINTINGS: EARLY 18TH CENTURY

When Claude Sicard visited the Monastery of St. Paul in 1716, the Cave Church had been recently repainted. He was not impressed.

"The walls are covered by very rude paintings representing stories from the Holy Scriptures. The monk, who executed this painting, informed us that he had never learned to paint. His work was evident proof of that. We asked him from where he had obtained his different colors, and he told us that he had extracted them from the colored soil in the neighboring hills."

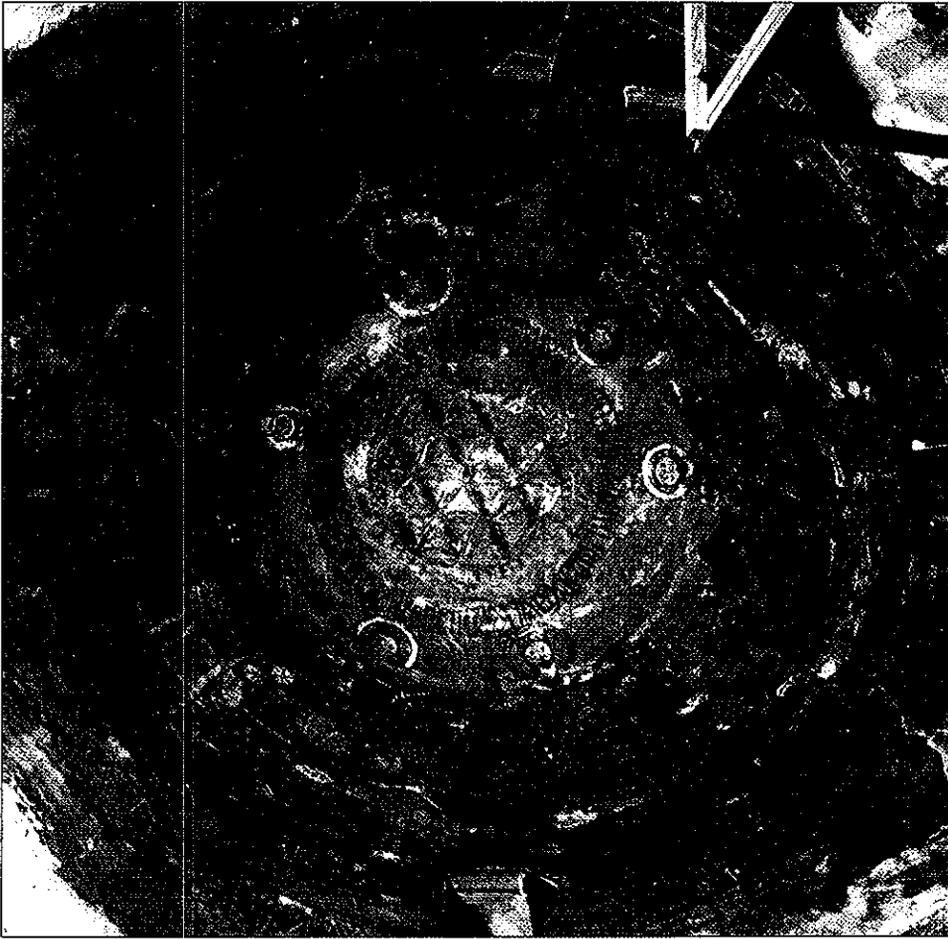
The monk-painter of c.1713 may have used simple techniques, such as drawing the heads and halos of the saints with a compass, but his sacred figures are endowed with a powerful individuality. He also had a clear understanding of the Coptic iconographical tradition.

How he obtained his knowledge is an intriguing question. His work in the Cave Church follows a hiatus of nearly four centuries, when the painting of Coptic churches and icons seems to have been largely unpracticed in Egypt.

The monk would have been familiar with the earlier paintings in the Cave Church, and probably those in the



*The Three Holy Youths in the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar.
"But an angel of the Lord came down into the furnace, so that the fire
did not even touch them or cause them any pain." - Daniel 3:49-50*



Dome of the Martyrs.

"And there appeared riders on horses like the pictures of the Saints which are in the churches, and they were turning about the dome, and the tails of their horses were switching, and all the people witnessed them." A miraculous apparition from the time of Pope Cyril III (1216-1243).

Monastery of St. Antony, but much of his inspiration seems to have been literary. Passages from the Bible, the liturgy and the lives of the martyrs often determine the special details applied to each saint.

The monk-painter of c.1713 was a herald of the 18th-century revival in Coptic painting. He was able to

anticipate much of the iconography, which would soon be widely employed in Coptic icons.

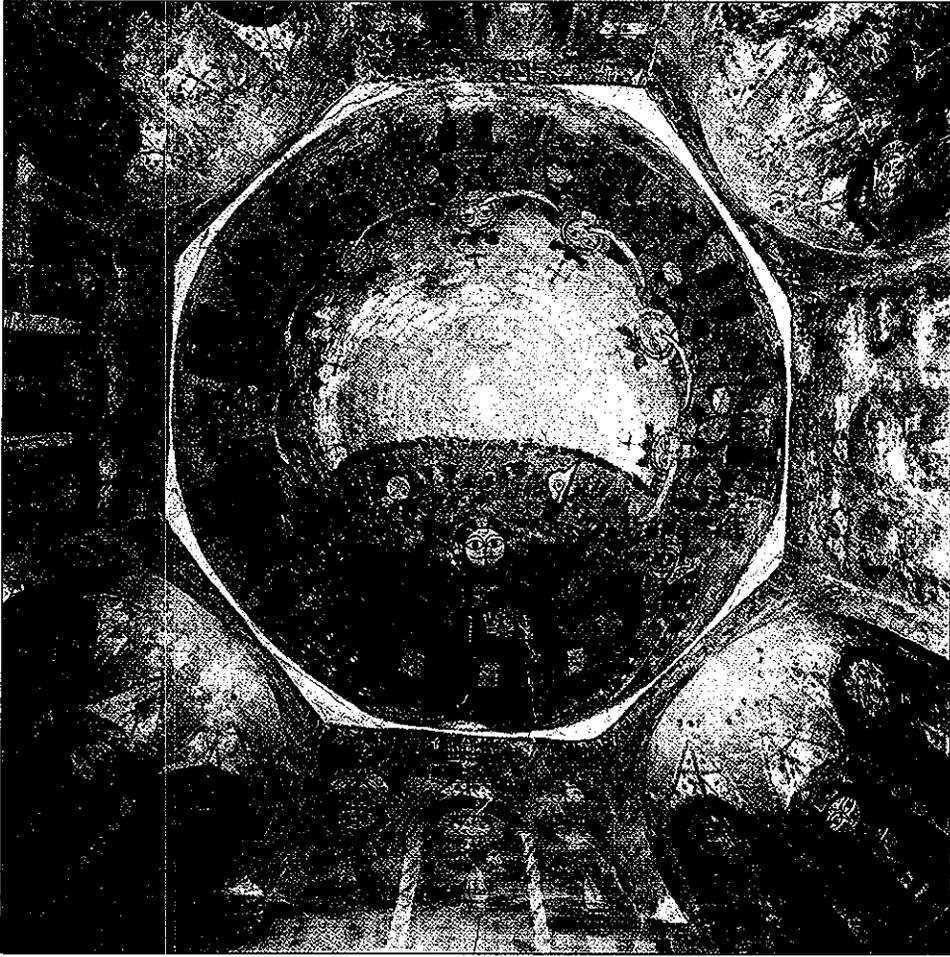
The monk's choice of saints, however, is at times surprising. An unusual feature of his program is the depiction of female saints. It is rare to find wall paintings of holy women in a Coptic church.



"Rejoice, O Mary, the Handmaiden and Mother; for He who is on Thy lap the Angels praise. And the Cherubim worship Him worthily, and the Seraphim without ceasing." - Hymn of the Aspasmos from the Coptic Liturgy



"Seven Archangels, always praising as they stand before the Pantocrator. Michael is the first, Gabriel is the second, Raphael is the third: a symbol of the Trinity." - Doxology of the Angels from the Coptic Liturgy



Dome of the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse.

"And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment, and they had on their heads crowns of gold."

"And round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of

eyes within: and they rest not day or night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

"The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever."

"And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets."

*- Revelation of St. John the Divine
(4:4; 4:6-8; 4:10; 8:2)*

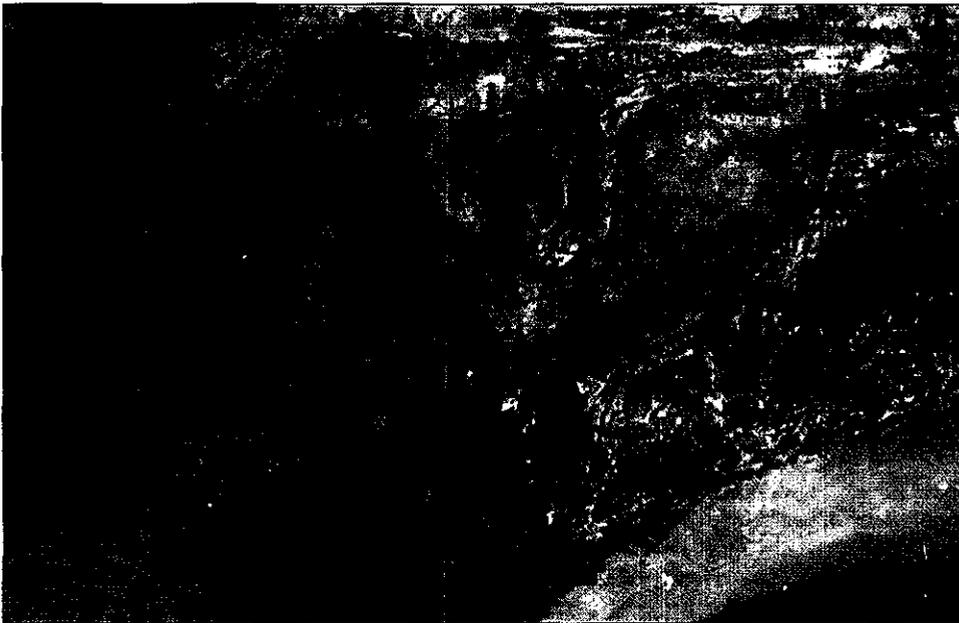
WALL PAINTINGS: 13TH AND 14TH CENTURIES

The earliest paintings in the Cave Church may be dated to the first half of the 13th century. The most complete program from this phase is found in the *haykal* of St. Antony.

The eastern wall contains an apse with an enthroned *Theotokos* (Mother of God), flanked by two angels. Above the apse is an Annunciation, with Gabriel (left), the Virgin Mary (right) and a domed building representing the spring of Nazareth (center). On the northern wall is the head of St. John the Evangelist, all that remains of his standing figure.

In 1333-1334, a second painter added a Christ *Pantocrator* (Ruler over all) above the Annunciation. The enthroned figure is set within a sky blue mandorla. The Four Living Creatures of the Apocalypse and two angels surround the image, the latter extending into the pendentives of the dome. This same painter also added two angels with six wings covered with eyes on the west wall of the *haykal*. The Coptic liturgy mentions "Seraphim with six wings (and) Cherubim full of eyes."

Other early paintings, probably from the 13th-century program, are found on the ceiling of the nave and on the walls of the corridor leading to

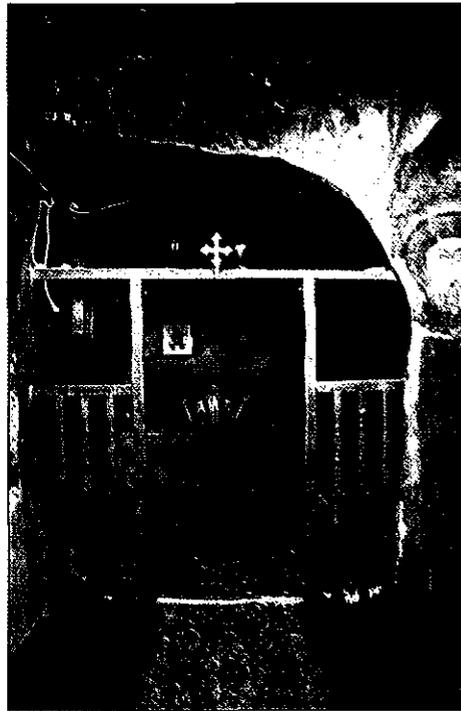


*Archangel Gabriel, a 13th century painting in the haykal of St. Antony.
"O messenger of good tidings among the choir of angels, saying to the
Virgin, 'You shall bring forth the Savior of the whole world.'"*

the Church of St. Mercurius. There is a *Deesis* (entreaty) on the ceiling before the *haykal* screen of St. Antony. It shows the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist interceding for humanity on either side of Christ.

Above the entrance of the tomb chamber of St. Paul are two more images of uncertain significance. They depict an angel carrying a child, and a pair of unidentified saints within a mandorla.

In the corridor are two Desert Fathers, who have been tentatively identified as Saints Shenouda and Bishoi. They were painted over in the beginning of the 18th century.



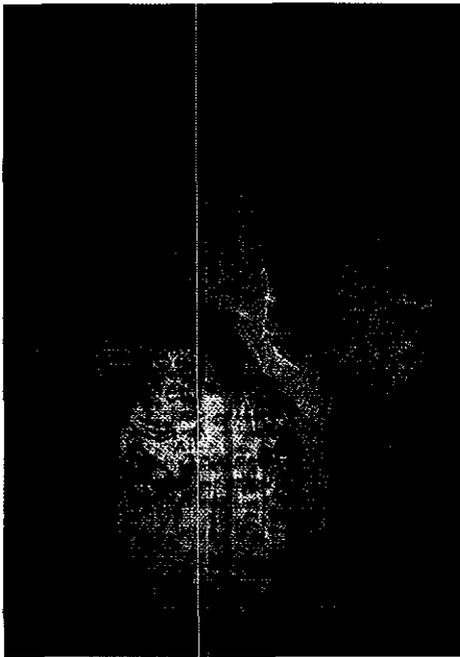
Cenotaph of St. Paul.

CENOTAPH AND HAYKAL OF ST. PAUL THE FIRST HERMIT

It is said that St. Antony buried St. Paul outside of his cave with the help of two lions of the desert. Where he placed the earthly remains of the First Hermit is not known, but they must be somewhere within the grounds of the monastery.

In the small, rock-cut nave before the *haykal* dedicated to St. Paul is a white marble cenotaph. Although it contains no relics of the saint, it is a symbolic reminder of his presence.

There are no paintings in the *haykal*. The walls are as bare as when it served as the cave of St. Paul.

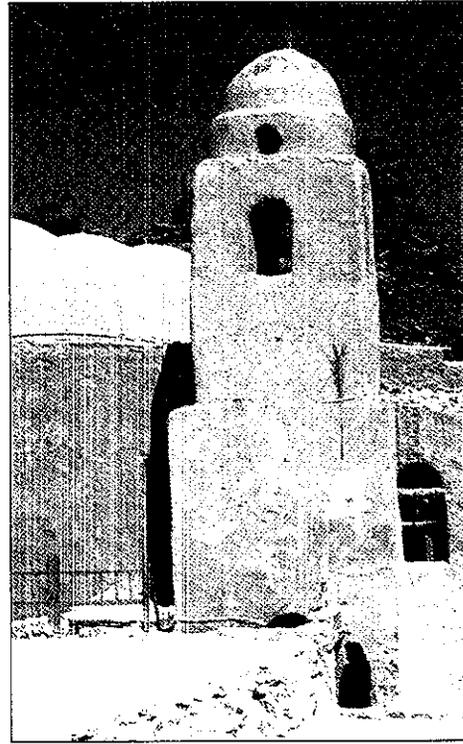


Christ Pantocrator painted in 1334-35 in the haykal dedicated to St. Antony in the Cave Church.

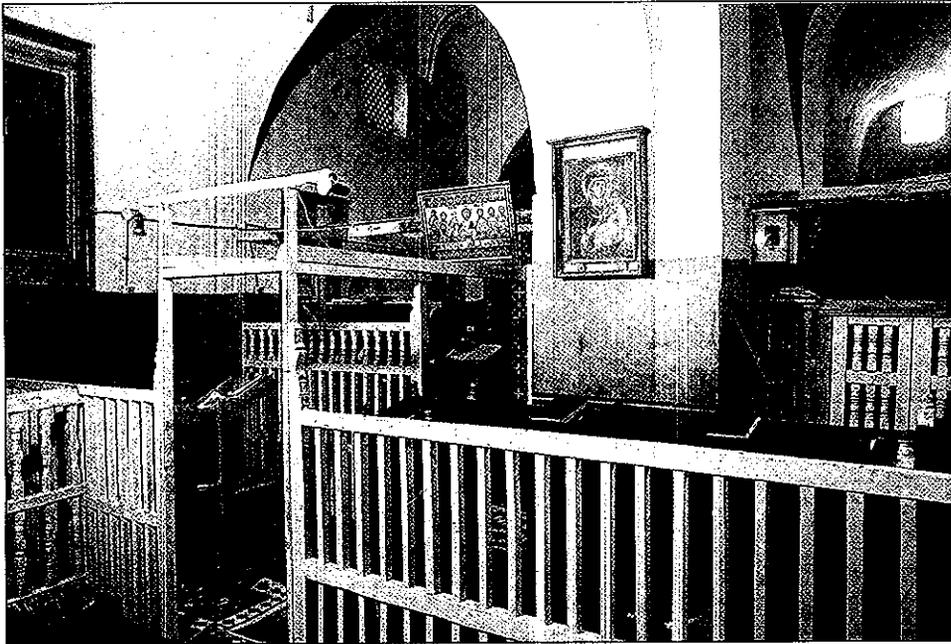
CHURCH OF ST. MERCURIUS

The Church of St. Mercurius (Abu Sayfayn) was built in 1781 by Ibrahim al-Jawhari, a leading Coptic official of the late 18th century. It is partially constructed over the Cave Church of St. Paul, and contains an interior, rock-cut staircase descending into the lower church. The building is covered by three domes and barrel vaults.

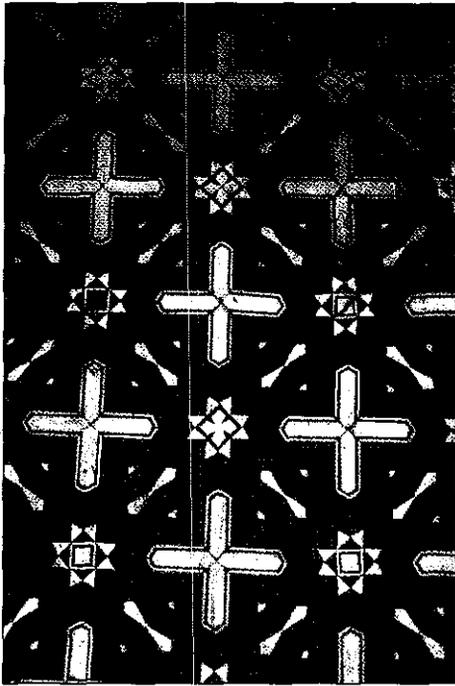
The church has a single *haykal* dedicated to St. Mercurius, and a side chamber used as a vestry. The carved wooden sanctuary screen, known as a *higab* (veil), is inlaid with crosses and stars of ivory.



*Bell Tower of the
Church of St. Mercurius.*



Interior of the Church of St. Mercurius.



Detail of the inlaid ivory Hignab.

The *hignab* of a Coptic church contains a round-arched entrance with double doors leading into the sanctuary. On each side is a small square window with a sliding shutter.

A curtain, embroidered with crosses or an image of the dedicatory saint of the *haykal*, covers the door. Copts kiss the hem of this curtain upon entering the church.

During the celebration of the liturgy, the curtain is drawn aside, and the doors are opened inward towards the altar, allowing the congregation to witness the ceremony. At a certain point in the mass, the priest hangs a censer of burning incense from a ring fastened to the arch of the doorway.

St. Mercurius was a soldier martyred in 250 by Emperor Decius. He is known in Arabic as Abu Sayfayn, the Father of the Two Swords.

After his martyrdom, the saint is credited with many miraculous appearances. The most famous occurred in 363, when he slew Julian the Apostate, the nephew of Constantine who had attempted to reestablish paganism in the Empire.

St. Mercurius is usually depicted in icons as an equestrian holding two swords above his head. He frequently carries a spear as well, with which he stabs the prostrate figure of Julian beneath his horse.

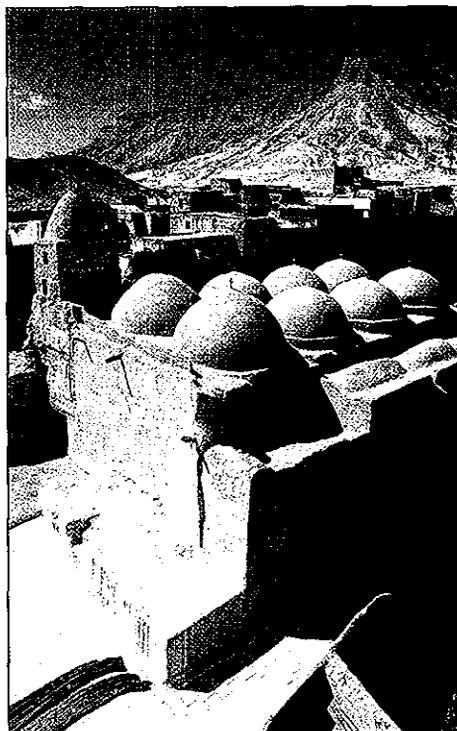


Icon of St. Mercurius.

CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL

Patriarch John XVII (1726-1745) had been a monk of St. Paul's. In 1727, he ordered the construction of the Church of St. Michael the Archangel. It is the largest church in the monastery.

The traditional arrangement of Coptic churches places the entrance in the west, opposite the sanctuary. The eastern wall of the Church of St. Michael, however, faces the main court of the monastery. The architect had to use some ingenuity to avoid placing the entrance in the sanctuary wall.



The Church of St. Michael the Archangel is covered by eight domes.



Interior of the Church of St. Michael.

Visitors first pass under the bell tower of the church, then walk nearly the full length of the building before reaching the entrance. Once within, they find themselves at the western end of the church.

The nave is divided into three sections. Originally, the one furthest from the sanctuary was for recent converts who had not yet been baptized, the middle section was for the Christian laity, and the area closest to the sanctuary was for those receiving communion. Today, however, it is only during Morning Prayer that the two areas nearest the sanctuary are reserved for monks and novices of the monastery.

The church has two *haykals* dedicated to St. Michael (south) and St. John the Baptist (center). The northern chamber is used as a vestry.

Coptic churches usually have more than one sanctuary. According to Coptic canon law, a *haykal* may be used only once a day to celebrate mass, after which it must fast.

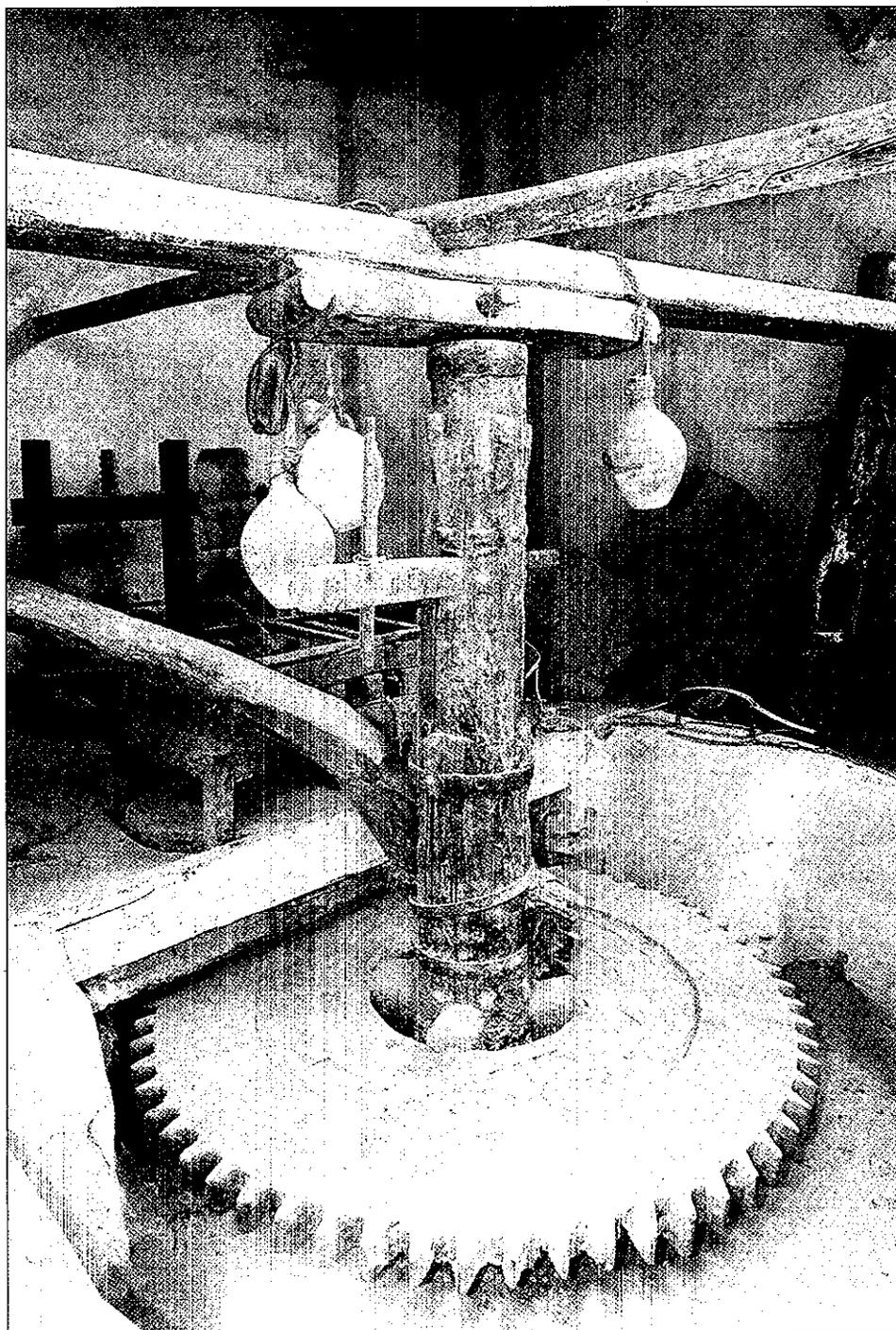
The icons on top of the *higab* screens are probably contemporary with the building of the church. Above the *haykal* of St. Michael is the Virgin and Child, flanked by seated apostles. The sanctuary of St. John has the Baptism of Christ and standing apostles dressed as monks.



An 18th-century icon of St. John the Baptist as "the angel of the desert." On his scroll are written the words of Isaiah (40:3), "I send my messenger before you to prepare your way." The word 'angel' means 'messenger' in Greek.



Icon of St. Michael the Archangel.



Conservation work was carried out in the two old Mills between 1998 and 1999 by the Antiquities Development Project of the American Research Center in Egypt with funding from the United States Agency for International Development.

MILLS AND DIKSAR

The old refectory, two mills and a bakery are the first buildings one encounters when entering the main gate of the Monastery of St. Paul. A covered corridor connects the units of this complex, which is just within the gate on the left.

The old bakery is the first door on the right. It is adjacent to the refectory, which is entered at the far end of the corridor. The bakery is currently used as an office.

On the opposite side of the corridor are the old mills of the monastery. They are divided by another enclosed passageway.

The Monastery of St. Paul received grain from the Nile valley. It was transported by camel caravan across the Wadi 'Araba. The wheat was ground into flour, then baked into bread, a staple of the monastic diet.



This elaborately carved wooden box allowed grain to be funneled between the two millstones.

Each mill has a large wheel, which was turned by a donkey. Two millstones, one on top of the other, rest upon the wheel. The lower stone revolved; the upper one remained stationary. Some of the millstones are the bases of ancient Egyptian columns, discovered on monastic farms centuries ago.

Grain was funneled through a wooden box, which stood over the stones. A small receptacle at the base of the mill collected the flour.

The old service buildings of the monastery were erected on top of an underground hall, known as the *Diksar*, Coptic for 'larder.' It is a vaulted warehouse used to store such vital commodities as grain and oil. The *Diksar* is divided into three parallel chambers, which extend from the *Ma'tama* (the rope lift for food) to the Church of St. Mercurius. The *Diksar* is connected to the *Ma'tama* by a shaft in the walls.



The vaulted Diksar storage area was used in recent times as a pilgrims' hostel.

GARDEN

"Antony asked his monks to bring him a spade and a little corn. Having found a small plot of suitable ground, he tilled it; and having a plentiful supply of water, he sowed. This was how he got his bread.

"Later, seeing that people came, he cultivated a few pot-herbs, so that he might give some slight solace to those who had traveled so far to see him.

"The wild beasts in the desert, coming for water, often injured his seed and husbandry. But he, gently laying hold of one of them, said to them all, 'Why do you hurt me, when I hurt none of you? Depart, and in the name of the Lord come not nigh this

spot.' And they never again came near the place." - *Life of St. Antony* (50) by St. Athanasius.

The produce of the garden of the Monastery of St. Paul has always supplemented the meager diet of the monks. Within the garden are grown dates, olives, pomegranates, lemons, prickly pears, leeks, as well as parsley and other kitchen herbs.

It occupies most of the northeastern side of the monastic enclosure, creating an oasis of green in the desert. From the garden, a staircase leads to the upper ramparts of the walls. Nearby is a small chamber within the walls containing an old press, where olive oil was once produced.



Garden of the Monastery of St. Paul.

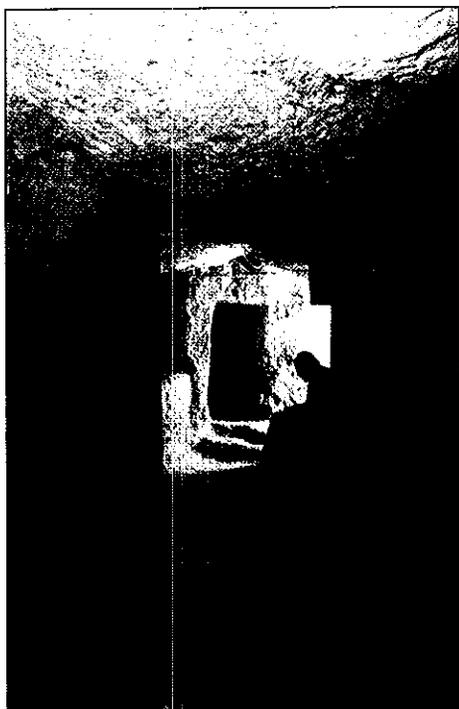
CAVE OF ST. MARQUS

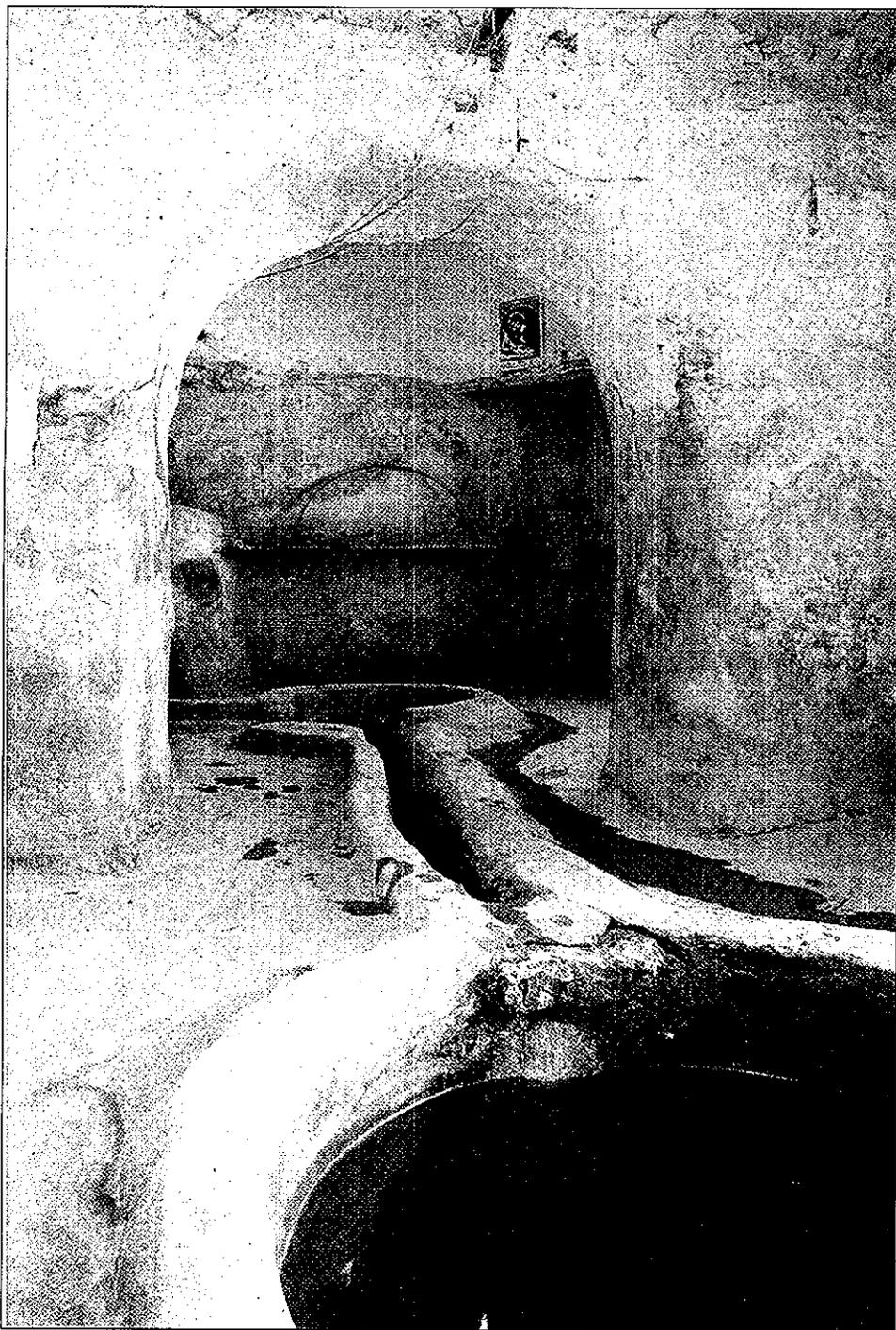
On the south side of the garden is a rise of natural rock containing a number of caves. One of them is a shrine dedicated to St. Marqus, a monk of St. Antony, who died in 1386. St. Marqus lived in the cave for six years while training with the elder monks of St. Paul. The cave has three rooms, one of which is an oratory. It probably resembles the original cave of St. Paul before it was transformed into a church. An 18th-century icon in the Monastery of St. Antony depicts St. Marqus standing in a garden.



St. Marqus (Cave Church).

Cave and Oratory of St. Marqus.





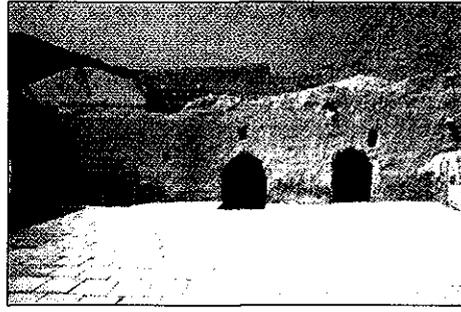
*Water from the Spring of St. Paul is the life source of the Monastery.
It is collected in three reservoir tanks, which are traditionally used
for drinking, washing and watering the garden.*

SPRING

The area of the eastern desert of Egypt was uplifted several times from the late Oligocene (25 million years ago) to the late Pliocene (two million years ago). This tectonic movement resulted in the formation of the Red Sea and a chain of mountains running parallel to the coast. In the area of the Monastery of St. Paul, these mountains are primarily made of limestone, but an earlier stratum of sandstone hills are found along their eastern side.

The mountains rise steeply in the east (the highest peak in the vicinity is 1104 meters above sea level), resulting in precipitation from the Red Sea sufficient to sustain permanent springs. Rain water permeates the limestone, then pools on an impermeable level of chalk and clay, which forms the base of the range.

The Monastery of St. Paul has two springs. The Spring of St. Paul issues from a mountain crevice on the southwest side. The water runs through a 30-meter-long underground channel, which feeds into three cement reservoir tanks within a small modern building. The spring was originally outside the monastery, but was later enclosed by the southern extension of the walls.



Spring Building.

The second spring, known as Ain Miriam, is a few hundred meters to the south. According to al-Maqrizi (d.1441), "They have a legend that Miriam, the sister of Moses, when he encamped with the Israelites in the neighborhood, purified herself at this spring."



Channel of the Spring of St. Paul.

MODERN BUILDINGS

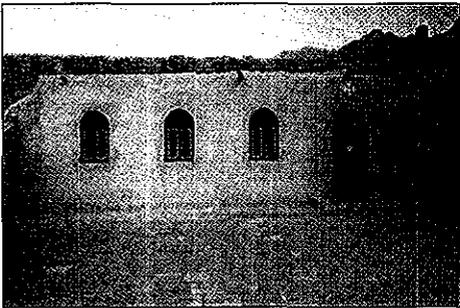
Since Bishop Agathon was appointed abbot in 1974, the Monastery of St. Paul has undergone an extraordinary rejuvenation. A modern complex has been constructed within the southern extension of the walls.

A new refectory was built in 1981 on a site hollowed out from the hillside. Other buildings soon followed in the same area, including a two-story street of cells (1985), a kitchen, a bakery and a new library (1993). A computer and audio-visual center has also been recently established within the

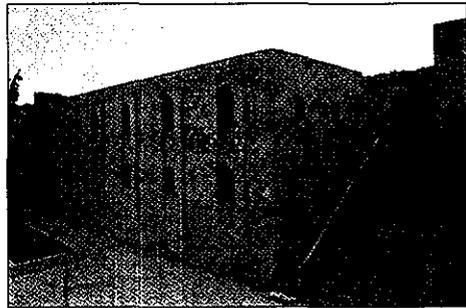
monastic enclosure.

Outside the walls, there has been continuous construction. Farm buildings, electric generators, workshops and cells have created a small town around the monastery.

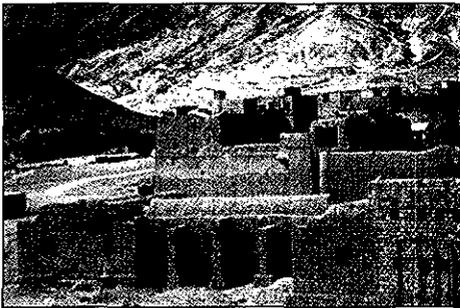
Perhaps the most remarkable development has been the enormous increase in Coptic pilgrims. In 1988, a road was constructed linking St. Paul's with the Red Sea highway. Before this time, only a path in the desert existed. In order to accommodate thousands of visitors, the monks have constructed new guest houses, retreat centers and canteens. Water tanks with capacities of up to 120 cubic meters now supplement the Spring of St. Paul.



New Library (1993).



New Cells (1985).



Old Guest House (1948).



New Guest House (1989).

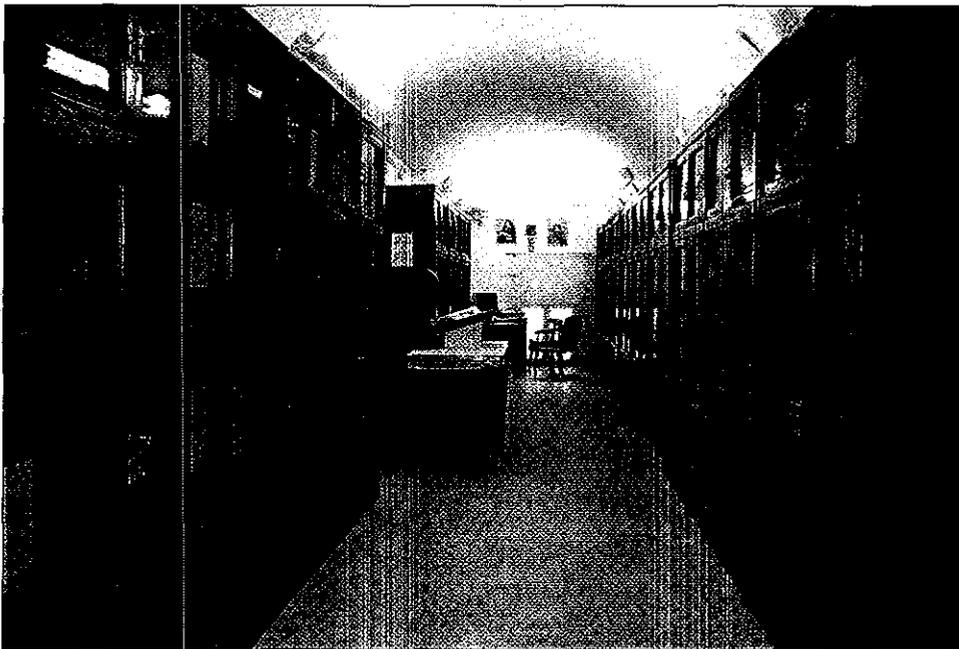
LIBRARY

The Library of the Monastery of St. Paul contains approximately 7,000 books, both printed and in manuscript. The Old Library was in one of the vaulted storage rooms on the north side of the main court. A New Library was built in 1993 within the southern extension of the monastic enclosure.

In 1930, Marcus Simaykah published a survey of the monastery's manuscripts in the *Guide du Musée copte*. He described 764 volumes dating from the 14th to the 20th century. This number consisted of 122 biblical, 99 theological, 123 historical, 411 ecclesiastical and nine miscellaneous works.



A monk with an illuminated manuscript from the Library of the Monastery of St. Paul.



The interior of the Library.



The Gospel of St. Matthew written in Coptic and Arabic in 1914.
 The scribe is named as Father Michael,
 a monk of the Monastery of St. Paul.

MANUSCRIPTS

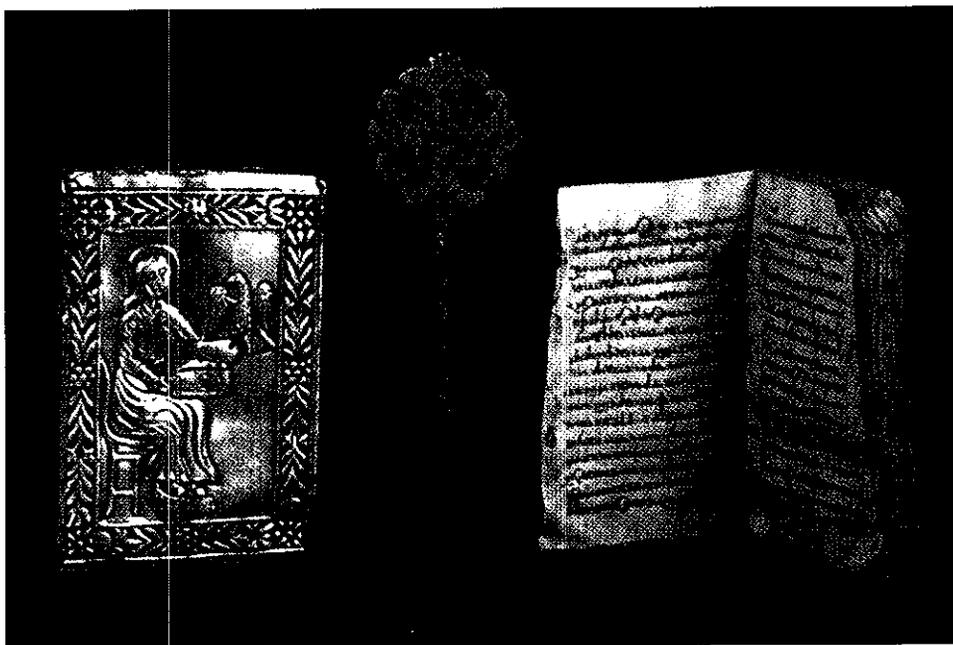
The Coptic language is the last phase of the ancient Egyptian vernacular transliterated in the Greek alphabet. Six additional letters, derived from the Demotic script, were added to express sounds not found in Greek.

The development of Coptic is closely related to the spread of Christianity in Egypt. Demotic, which ultimately developed out of hieroglyphs, was too closely associated with the religion of the pharaohs to be used in translating the Christian Scriptures. The oldest known biblical codex written in Coptic is from circa AD 200. By the

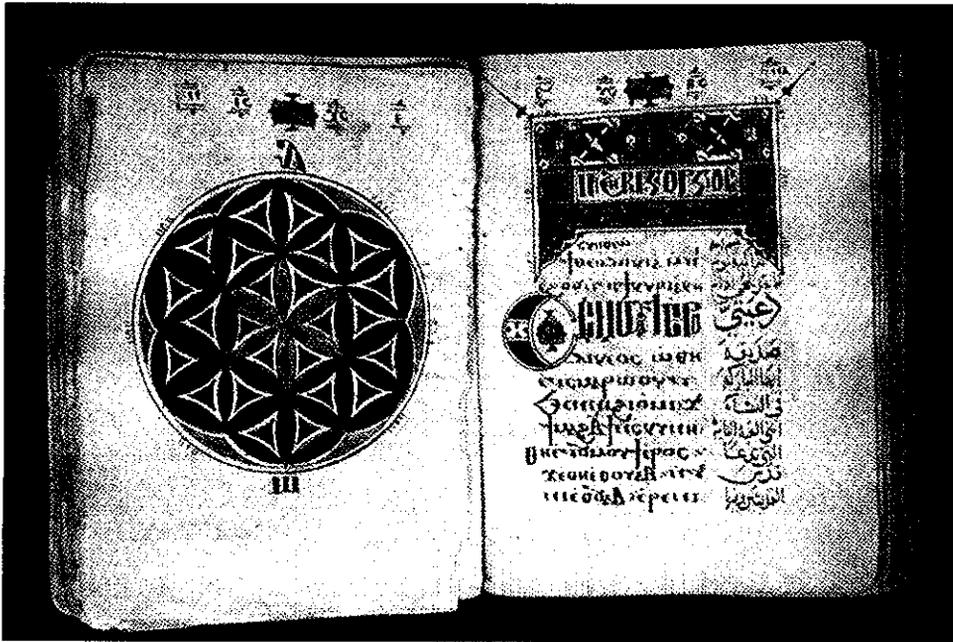
end of that century, the entire Bible had been translated into Coptic.

Under the Christian emperors (313-641), numerous Coptic translations were made from Greek. In the fifth century, St. Shenouda pioneered the development of Coptic as a literary language.

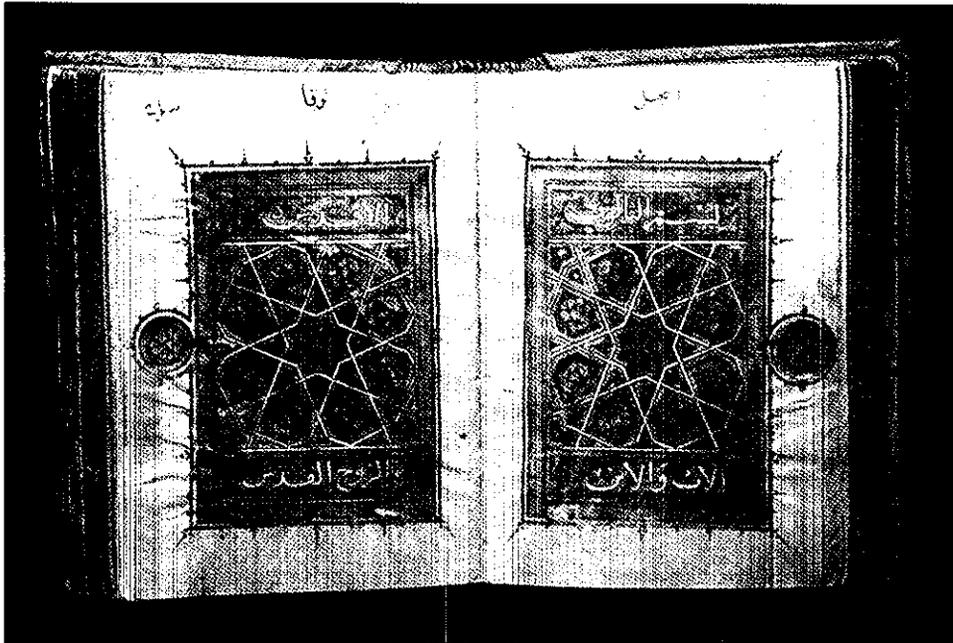
After the Arab conquest, the Muslim caliphs decreed that Arabic would be the exclusive language of government and commerce. The result was the emergence of Arabic as the language of Muslims and Christians alike. The steady decline of Coptic gave rise to a new Christian literature written in Arabic, which reached its peak in the 13th and 14th centuries.



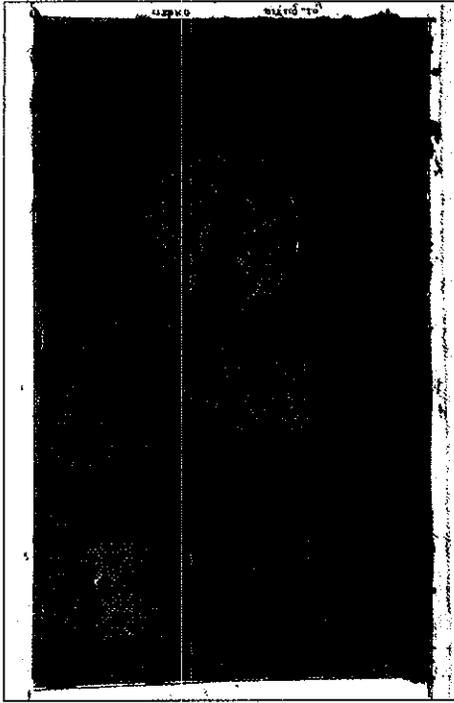
Silver Gospel case with an image of St. John the Evangelist.



The Seven Theotokia, salutations and praise for the Virgin used on her feast days, written in Coptic and Arabic in 1775.



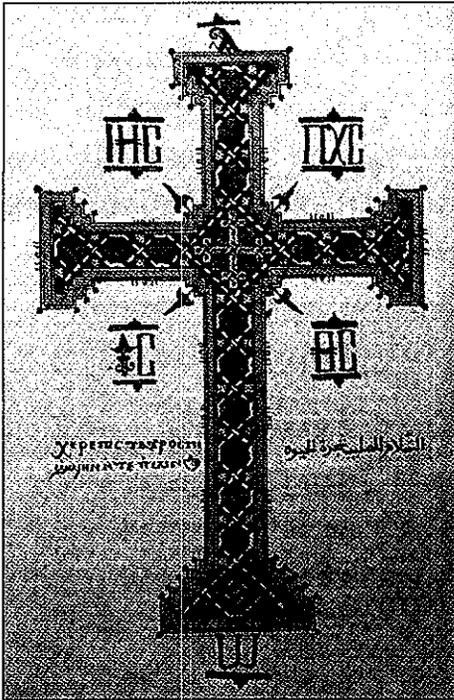
*"In the name of the holiest Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."
The title page of the Gospel according to St. Luke in Arabic from 1331.
This copy of the four Gospels is the oldest manuscript in the monastery.*



St. Mark the Evangelist.



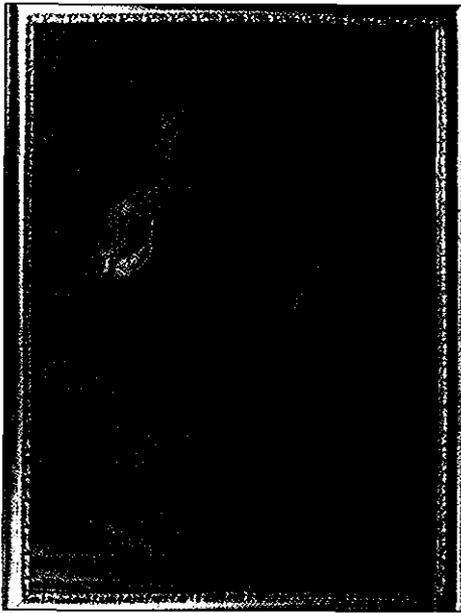
The Book of Revelation (1933).



'The Tree of Life' from the Gospel of St. Matthew (1914).



Psalmodia for the Month of Kiyahk.



St. Mark the Evangelist.



Virgin and Christ Child.



*Triptych of the Virgin and Christ Child
with SS. Antony and Paul.*



*Triptych of the Virgin and Christ Child
with Archangels Michael and Gabriel.*



*The Life of St. Paul the First Hermit.
(left): St. Nicholas without icon cover.*

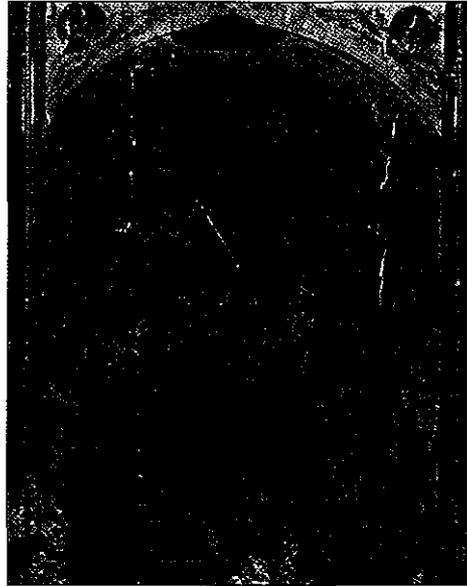
ICONS

The word icon derives from the Greek *eikon* (image). The term in its broadest sense refers to any sacred image, whether "painted with colors, made with little stones or with any matter serving this purpose." Icons may be "placed in the holy churches of God, on vases and sacred vestments, on walls and boards, in houses and on roads."

Icons which depict Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the holy angels or the venerable saints are visible symbols of the invisible realm of God. As such, they are a direct link between heaven and earth.

The veneration of the holy image is directed to the saint depicted on the icon. "For the honor rendered to the image goes to its prototype, and the person who venerates an icon venerates the person represented on it." By kissing, touching and kneeling before an icon, contact is established with the saint, who may then exercise his beneficent power or act as an intermediary between the believer and God.

The veneration of icons is "not the true adoration which, according to our faith, is proper only to the one divine nature, but is similar to the way we venerate the image of the precious and vivifying cross, the



Descent from the Cross.

holy Gospel and other sacred objects, which we honor with incense and candles according to the pious custom of our forefathers."



Descent into Hell.

The study of Coptic icons (i.e. portable religious paintings) is still in its infancy. The icons of Egypt are only occasionally dated or signed by their painters. At times, the inscription only mentions the patron of the icon. An unnamed artist, for example, painted the *Life of St. Paul* (p.72), in 1714 for Abu Khazam and his daughter Marium. Most extant Coptic icons were produced after the 17th century. Some are obviously the work of untrained painters (p.78), who were less concerned with the production of fine art than with the spiritual discipline involved in creating sacred images.

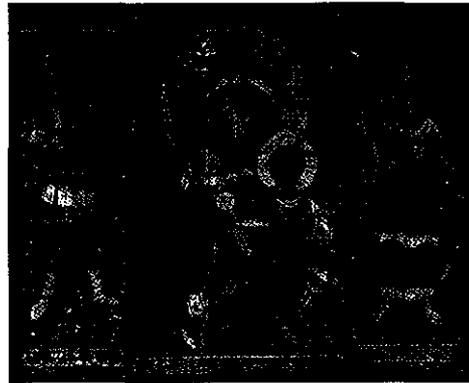
Coptic icons often reflect foreign influences, including Armenian, Melkite, Greek and Syrian. Some were produced in Egypt for Coptic patrons. Others were painted abroad, in such centers as Jerusalem.

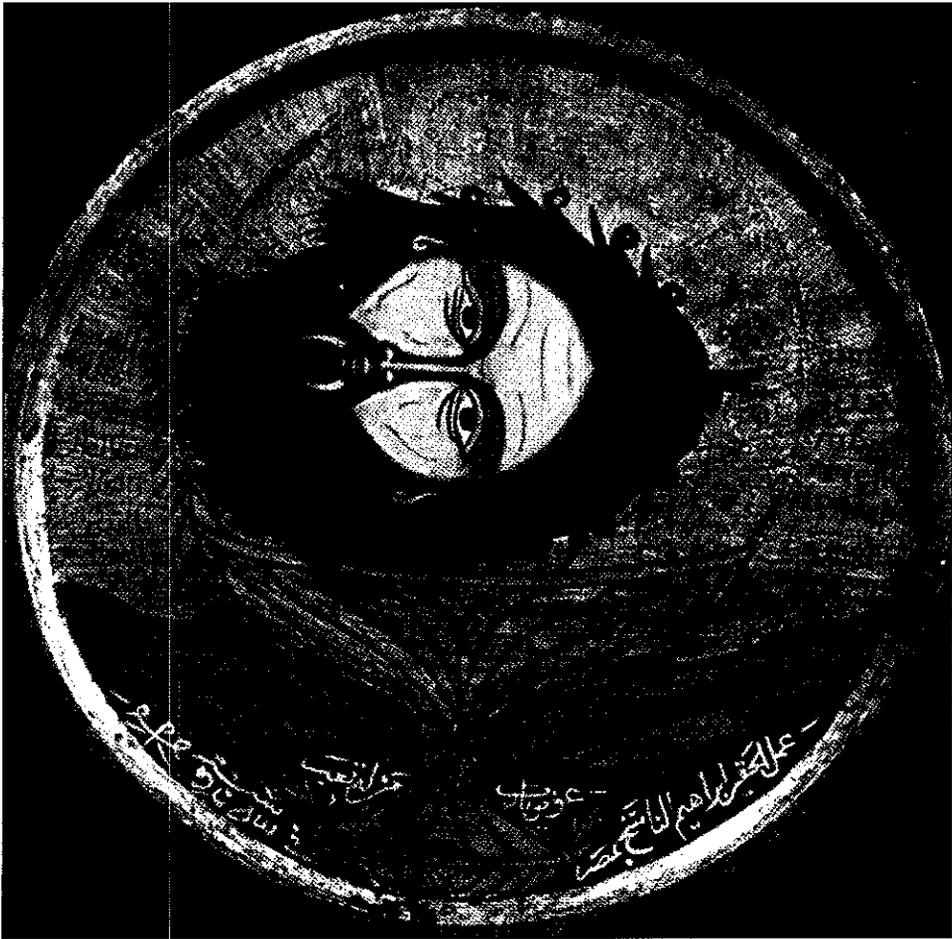
Egyptian icons were made with a variety of techniques. They can be painted on wooden boards primed with gesso, or on canvas (or paper) nailed (or glued) to wooden supports. Some are oil paintings on canvas.

Top: Virgin and Christ Child with the infant St. John the Baptist.

Middle: Triptych of the Virgin and Christ Child with SS. Michael and Gabriel the Archangels.

Bottom: St. George.

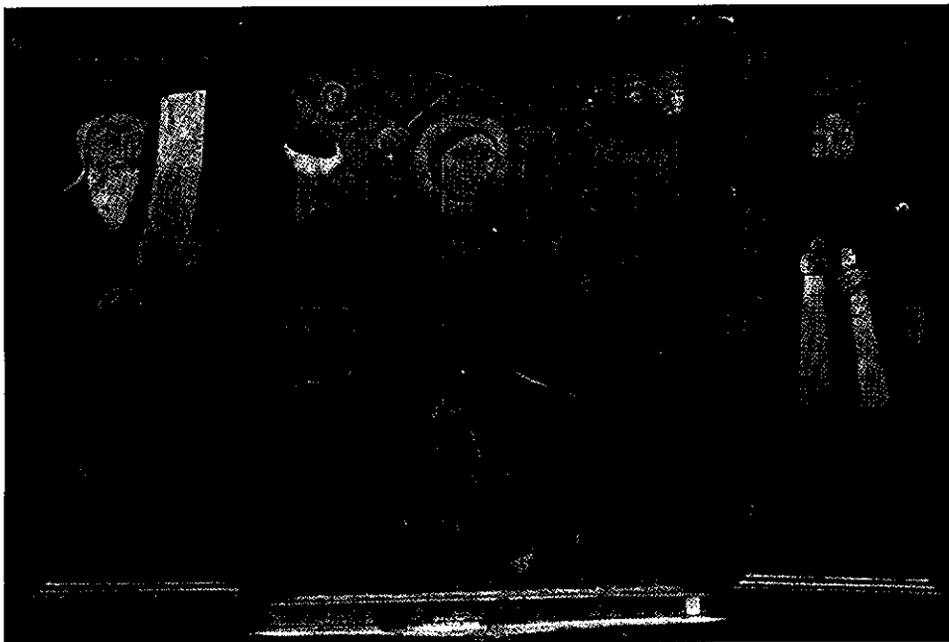




*"St. John the Baptist's holy head. We glorify him and ask his blessing.
Martyr, angel, great prophet, priest and son of a priest.
Painted by the despicable Ibrahim the Scribe in Egypt in 1746.
May God repay his humble efforts."*

The Monastery of St. Paul has a large and varied collection of icons. The origin of most of them is uncertain. Many were no doubt painted in Egypt, but others were pious donations from abroad. The Russian icon of St. Nicholas (p.72) may have been a gift from Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855), perhaps brought by Porphyrius Uspensky who visited the monastery

in 1850. The oil painting of St. Mark the Evangelist (p.72), which Uspensky regarded as the best icon in the monastery, was painted in Europe, but how it reached Egypt is unknown. A Coptic pilgrim probably brought the triptych of the Virgin and Child with two angels (p.72) from Jerusalem in the 19th century.



Triptych of St. Mercurius (Abu Sayfayn) with St. Dioscorus, 25th Coptic Patriarch and St. Macarius the Bishop, painted by Anastasi al-Rumi or his school, 19th century.

The earliest Coptic icons date from the sixth and seventh centuries. We know from historical sources that they continued to be produced after the Arab conquest of 641. Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa (c.1000) in his *History of the Patriarchs* provides many stories about miraculous icons. The Coptic theologian Ibn Siba' wrote in the 13th century: "In the churches there should be painted images in color, depicting martyrs and saints whose lives are read to the people to urge believers to imitate their conduct." Unfortunately, no medieval Coptic icons are known to have survived.

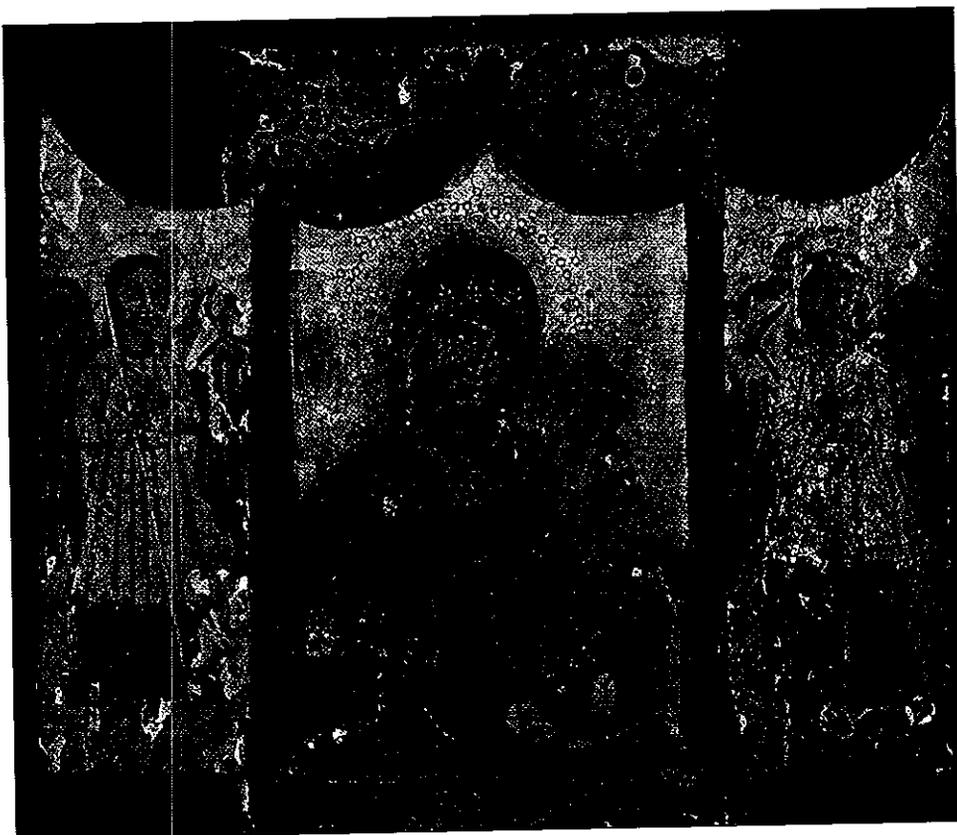
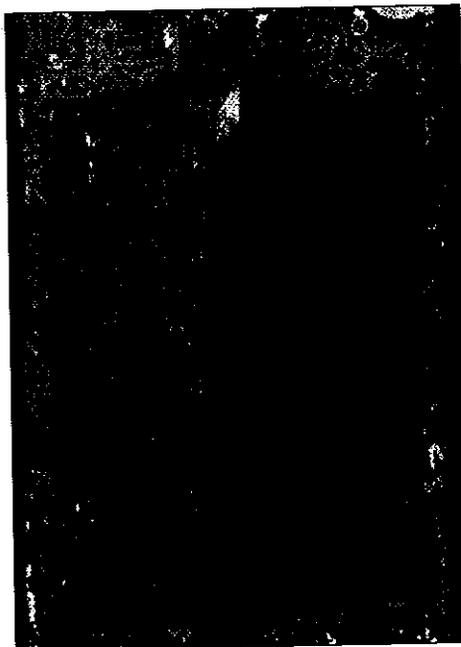


Virgin Mary and Christ Child with St. Paul and St. Antony, painted by Anastasi al-Rumi or his school, 19th century.

Opposite: Triptych of the Virgin and Christ Child with Angels, shown open and closed.

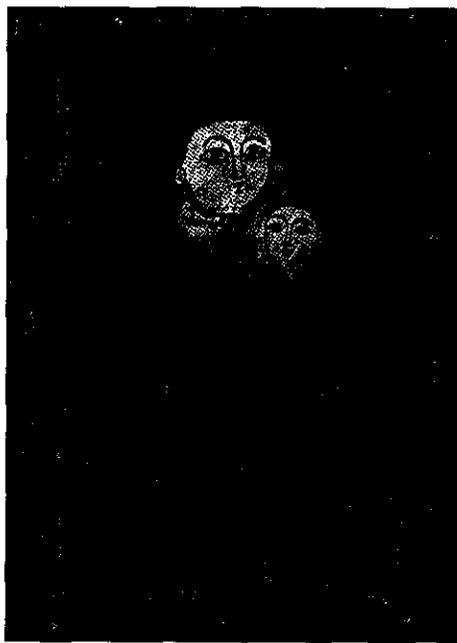
The reason for this 'Dark Age' of Coptic icon painting is currently a mystery. Scholars have suggested that old icons were used as fuel for the preparation of Mariun (holy oil), but this does not explain the complete absence of all icons from Egypt for a thousand years.

It is possible that with greater study some icons may be identified as having been produced before the 17th century. The triptych on this page, with its unusual pointed trefoil arch and Arabic inscription surrounded by an arabesque, may be such an example.



In the 18th century there was an enormous revival in icon production in Egypt. The most famous painters of this period are Ibrahim al-Nasikh (the Scribe), who was probably a Copt (p.75), and Yuhanna Armani al-Qudsi (the Armenian from Jerusalem). These two artists and their assistants painted hundreds of icons.

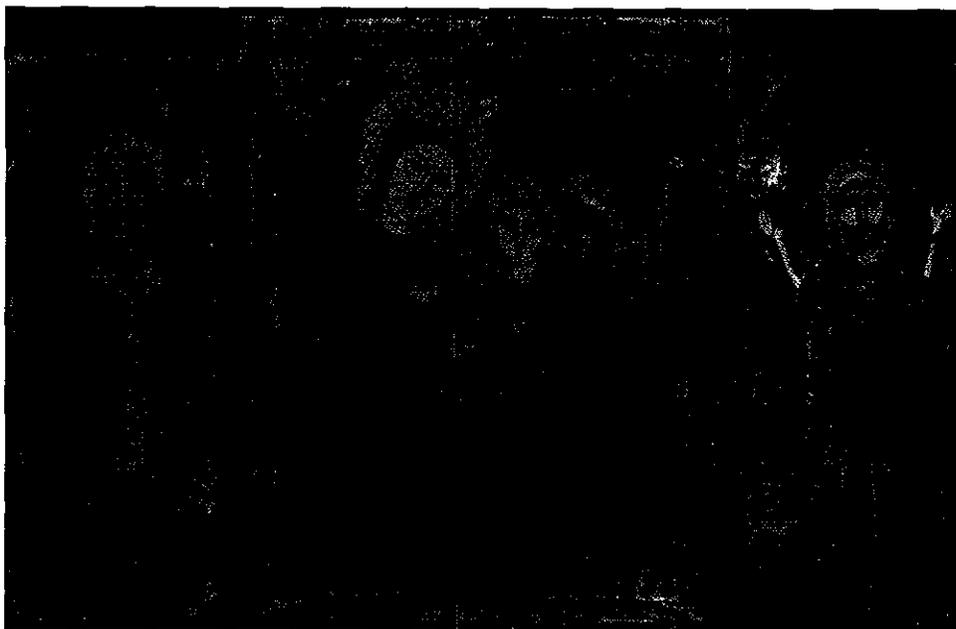
The most prolific painter of the 19th century was Anastasi al-Rumi (the Greek) (p.76). Like Yuhanna, a hundred years before, he came from Jerusalem. Both artists were active at a time when the standard of living among the Copts was generally higher than that of their Muslim neighbors, and powerful Christian patrons, such as Ibrahim al-Jawhari (d.1795), were able to restore monasteries and



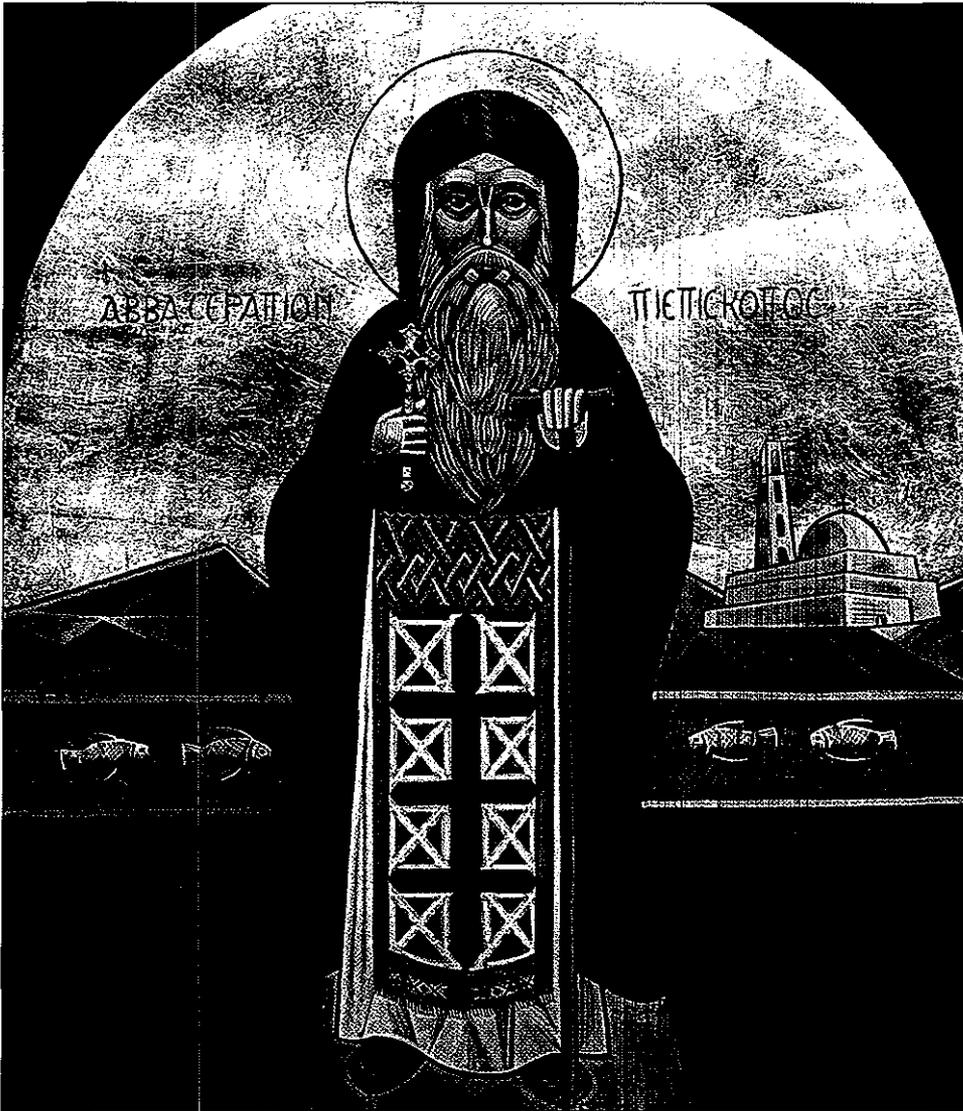
Virgin Mary and Christ Child.

churches throughout Egypt.

After 1870, however, there was a decline in icon production that was to last for nearly a century.



Triptych of the Virgin Mary and Christ Child with St. Paul and St. Antony.



Modern icon of St. Sarapion, Bishop of Tmuis, disciple of St. Antony, painted by a student of Isaac Fanous.

There has been a tremendous resurgence of Coptic icon painting in the second half of the 20th century. This revival is largely due to Isaac Fanous, who was appointed director of the Art and Archaeology section of the Patriarchate's Institute of Coptic Studies in 1956.

Fanous established a flourishing school of Coptic art, which helped fix the iconographic rules for the painting of sacred images. His students, both monks and lay-people, produce icons, wall paintings, mosaics and stained glass windows for Coptic churches throughout the world.

EUCCHARISTIC OBJECTS

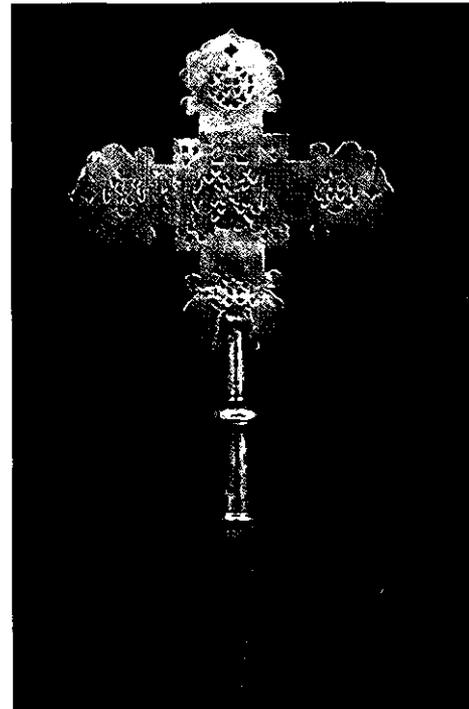
Within the *haykal* is the altar, where the bread and wine of the Eucharist are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. The altar in Coptic Churches is a freestanding cube usually made of stone. It is covered with three altar veils. The first is a tight fitting case of cotton or linen, which completely covers the altar. On top of this is a second covering made of silk embroidered with crosses. Between these two is placed the consecrated altarboard. The third and smallest covering is placed over the oblation during most of the liturgy (see page 96).

Candelabra frequently stand on the north and south ends of the altar, representing the two angels who appeared inside the Holy Sepulcher. A copy of the Gospels contained within a silver case is also placed on the altar (see page 69).

A basin and ewer, resting on a low wooden stand at the north side of the altar, are used to wash the priest's hands after all have partaken of the Holy Communion. Before praying the final blessing and dismissal, the priest takes the ewer in his left hand and sprinkles water over the congregation.



Bishop Agathon celebrating the Feast of the Cross.



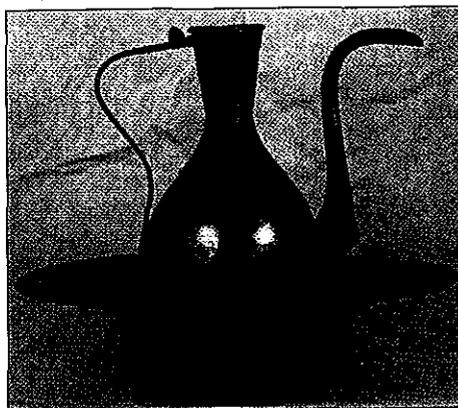
Processional Cross.

In Exodus 30:1, God commanded Moses to "make an altar on which to burn incense." The perfume of incense symbolizes prayer and the presence of God in the sanctuary.

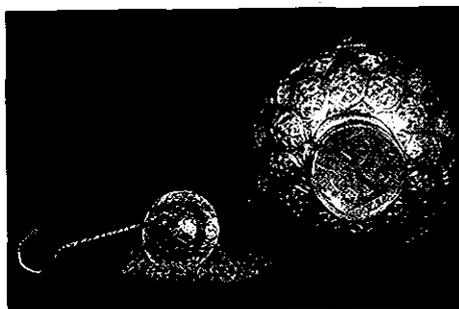
The censer containing the burning incense is also an analogy for the Virgin Mary. In the Hymn of the Censer, the congregation sings, "The censer is the Virgin; its sweet aroma is our Savior; She bore Him; He saved us; He forgave us our sins."

During the celebration of the liturgy, the censer is carried around the altar three times in glorification of the Holy Trinity.

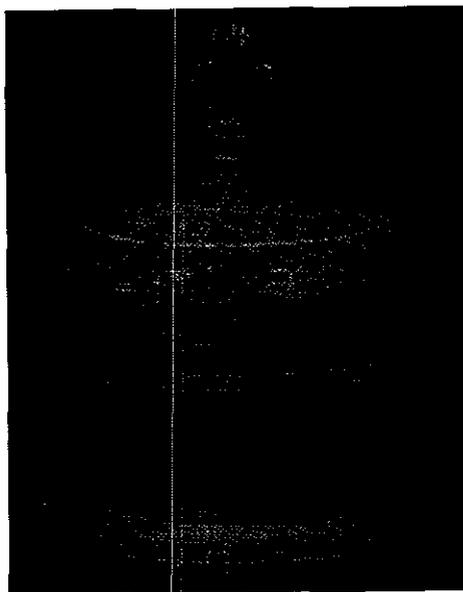
Incense is kept in a small box, which is placed at the right hand of the officiating priest. The box may be made of wood or silver.



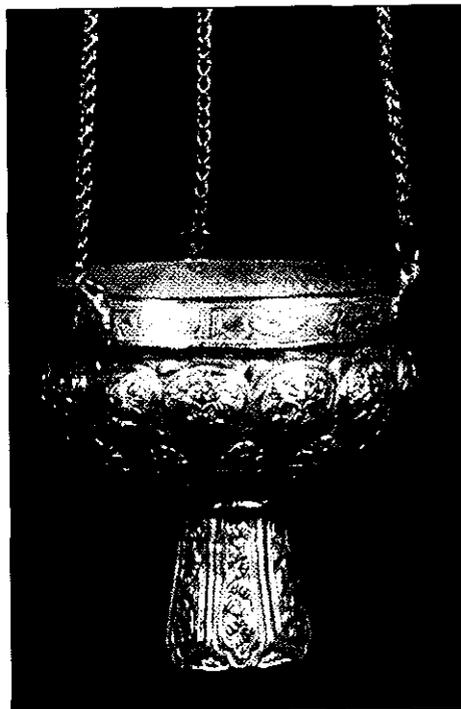
Basin and Ewer.



Censer.



Wooden Incense Box.



Censer.

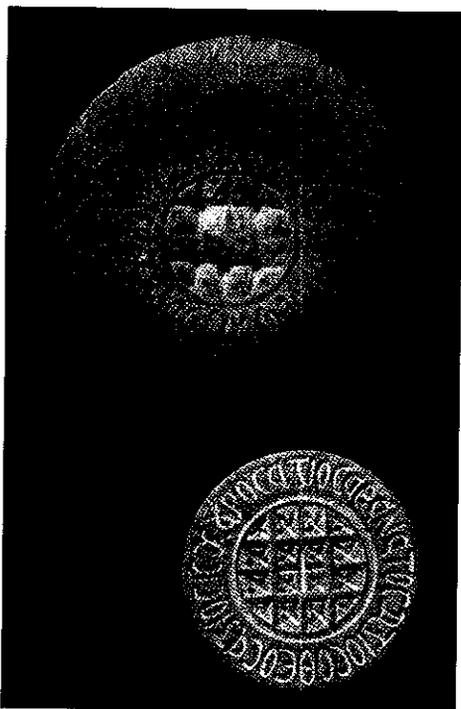
The Eucharistic bread must be leavened, unsalted and made of the finest wheat flour. Throughout its preparation, psalms are recited. The most perfect loaf is chosen for consecration as the *hamal* (Lamb).

During the liturgy, the *hamal* rests on the paten, a circular dish of silver or glass. It represents both the manger in which Christ was born, and His tomb.

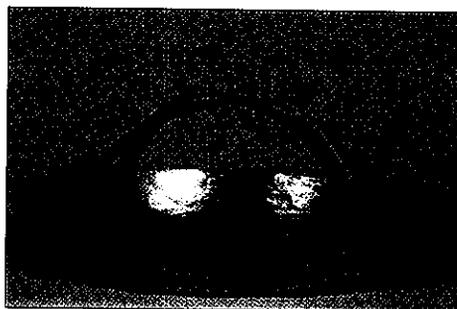
On the altar, a veil is placed over the paten. An asterisk (two half circles of metal crossed at right angles) is set over the paten, preventing the veil from touching the Lamb.



Before being baked, the bread is stamped with a wooden seal engraved with twelve crosses.



*The circular legend in Coptic:
"Holy God, Holy Mighty,
Holy Immortal."*



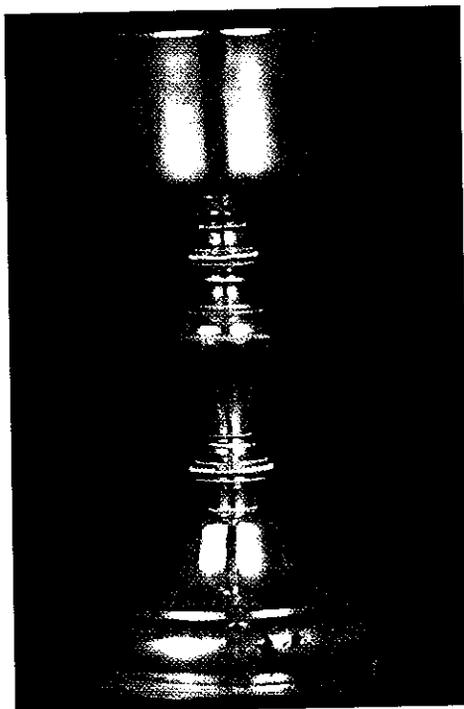
Paten with Asterisk.



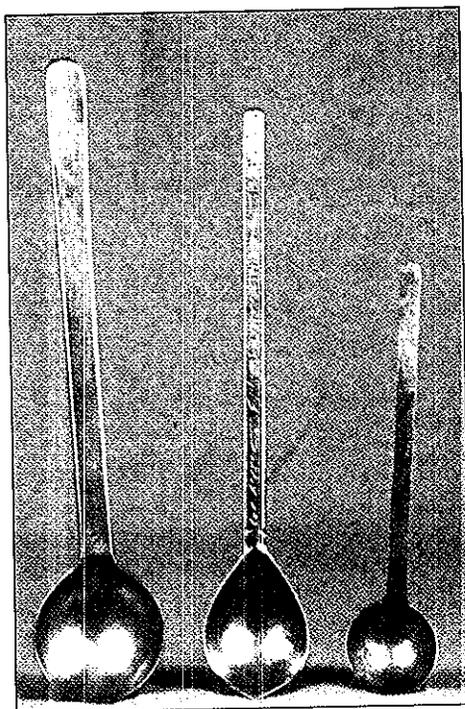
Artophorion.

The officiating priest pours the Eucharistic wine into the chalice, which is then mixed with water. The mixture of wine and water refers to the flow of blood and water from Christ's side when he was on the cross. A long-handled spoon is used to administer the Precious Blood to the communicants.

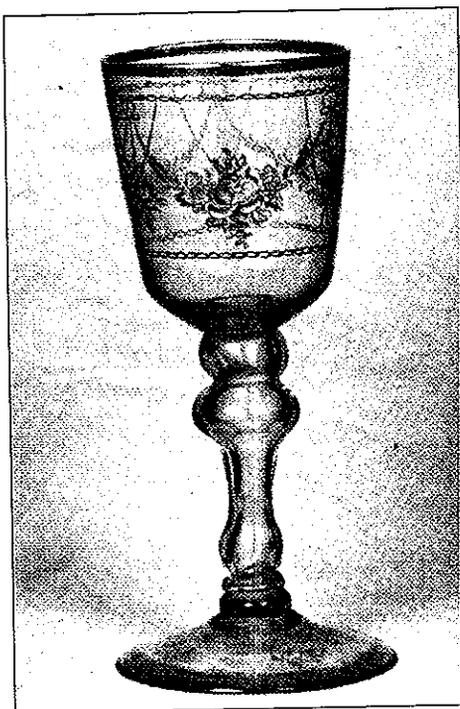
Those unable to attend the liturgy may have the Holy Body, moistened by a few drops of Precious Blood, conveyed to them in a casket known in Coptic as the *artophorion* (box of communion) and in Arabic as *huqq al-dhakhirah* (box of the reserve).



Silver Chalice.



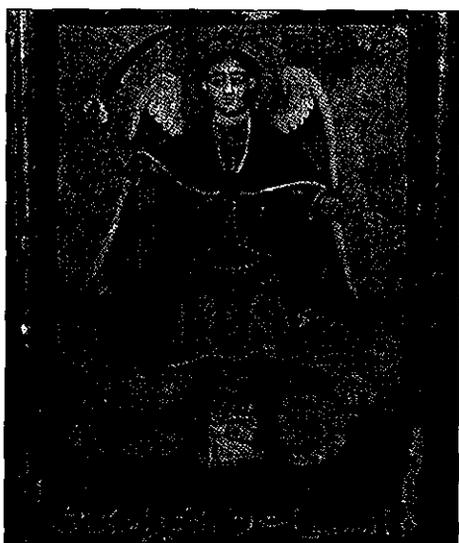
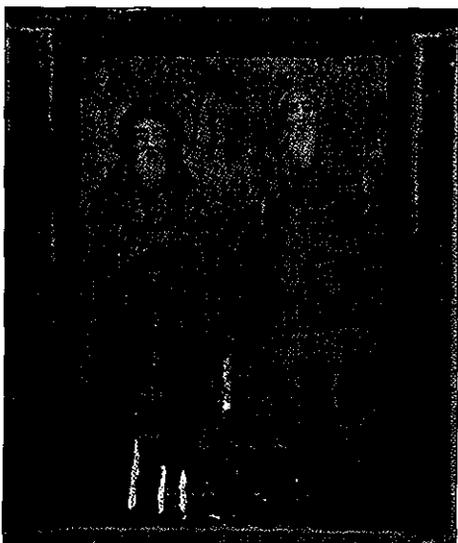
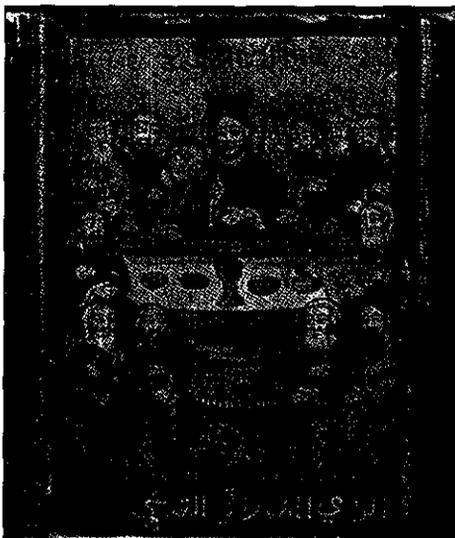
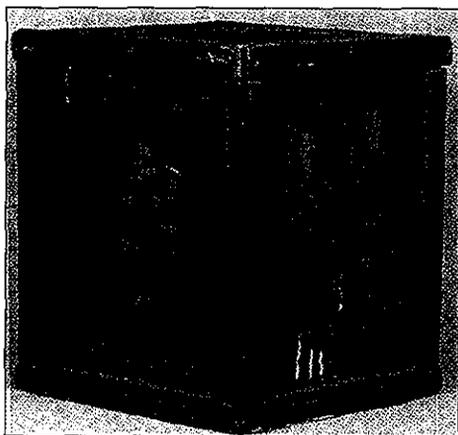
Eucharistic Spoons.

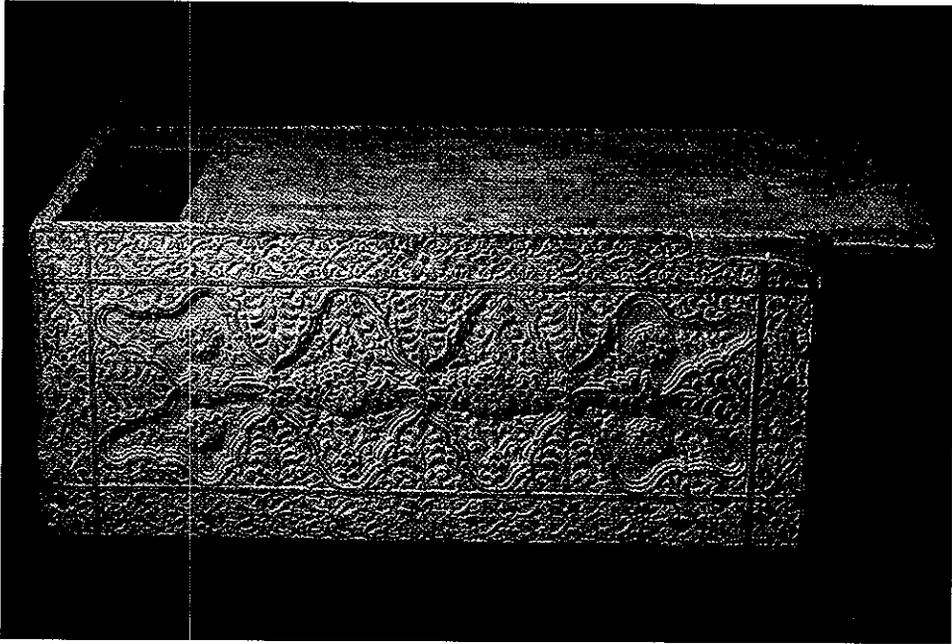


Glass Chalice.

The ark is a wooden box, which holds the chalice on the altar during the liturgical prayers prior to the consecration of the bread and wine. In Arabic it is known as the *kursi*, the 'throne' of the chalice.

The example illustrated here dates from 1745. The four sides have paintings of the Last Supper, the Virgin Mary and Christ Child, St. Antony and St. Paul, and Michael the Archangel.





Liturgical objects are generally stored in rectangular chests. The two examples illustrated here are both made of wood and elaborately

decorated. The carved chest (above) has a sliding lid, while the painted chest (below) has a lid which is attached by hinges.



VESTMENTS

According to Abu al-Makarim (c. 1171), St. Antony was the first to adopt the distinctive monastic habit, which Coptic monks wear to this day. The main articles of monastic dress consist of a black tunic and a close-fitting black hood or cowl.

The hood is made of two pieces of material stitched together along the top of the head. It is embroidered with thirteen crosses, symbolizing Jesus and his apostles. The historian Sozomen (c.448) suggests that the monks of Egypt "wore a cowl to show that they lived with the same innocence and purity as infants, who wear a covering of the same form."



A Coptic monk depicted on a luster-ware plate made in Egypt in the 11th century (Islamic Museum, Cairo).



Monks dressed in white for the celebration of the Feast of the Cross.



Anba Agathon in liturgical vestments.

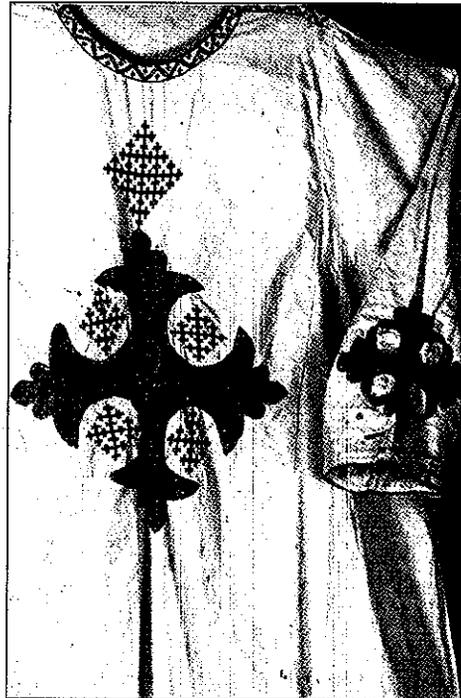
Although black is the color of the monastic habit, in church monks dress in white "like the angelic choir." White, the symbol of purity, is the predominate color of Coptic liturgical vestments.

Before they are first used, vestments must be consecrated by a bishop, who says the following prayer over them, "Graciously, O Lord, sanctify this vestment, purify it through the grace of Thy Holy Spirit. Purify our souls, our bodies, and our spirits." He then makes the sign of the cross, consecrating the vestment in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

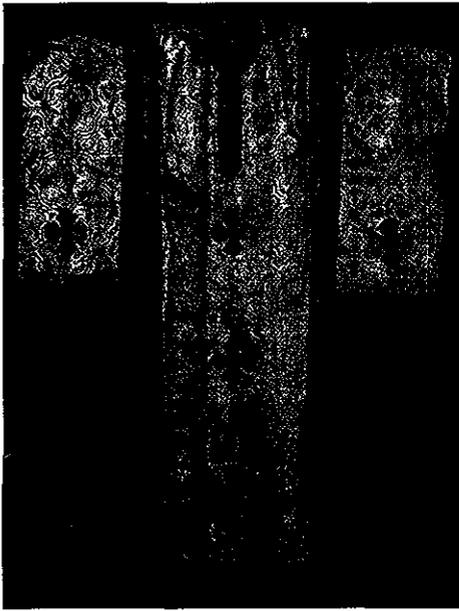
Before the liturgy, the officiating priest blesses the vestments in the name of the Trinity. Vestments may be used for only one divine service a day, after which they must 'fast.'

While putting on the vestments, the priest recites Psalm 93, "The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty," and Isaiah 61:10, "I will rejoice in the Lord, for he has clothed me with the garment of salvation."

Each of the three grades of the ecclesiastical hierarchy (bishops, priests and deacons) has its own liturgical vestments. Those of the episcopate are usually more elaborately decorated.



Sticharion.



Epitrachelion and Sleeves.

The sticharion is a long-sleeved linen tunic, which reaches down to the ankles. It is white and embroidered with gold crosses on front, back and sleeves. It has an opening on one or both shoulders, which close with buttons and loops. The sticharion is worn by all orders of the clergy from bishop down to subdeacon.

The cape (Arabic, *burnus*) is a loose sleeveless cloak worn by priests and bishops over the sticharion. It is embroidered with crosses and religious inscriptions.

The cap is a close-fitting, white cowl worn under the hood of the cape. It is embroidered with crosses.

The epitachelion is a rectangular band, approximately two meters long, which is worn by priests and

bishops over the sticharion tunic. It has an opening for the head, allowing a small section to hang down the back while the remainder reaches down in front to the feet. The epitachelion can be made of various materials (including silk, cotton and velvet) in colors other than white. If worn by a patriarch or a bishop it is embroidered with the figures of the twelve apostles. The wearing of the epitachelion is a symbolic allusion to Psalm 133, "Praise be God who has poured His grace upon His priest, like the precious oil running down on the



Epitrachelion and Sleeves.

collar of his robe." It also signifies the act of carrying the cross and assuming the yoke of responsibility on behalf of the congregation.

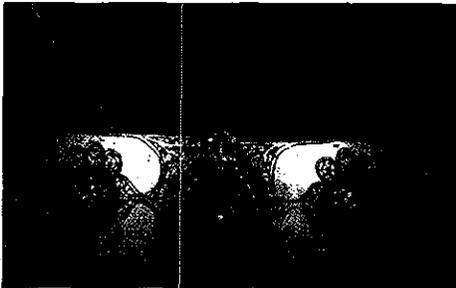
Sleeves are of the same color and material as the epitachelion. They are worn over the arms of the sticharion. When belonging to a patriarch or a bishop they are often embroidered with biblical inscriptions and figures of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child.

The girdle, which is held together by a silver clasp, is worn around the waist on top of the epitachelion. It is associated with the leather girdle worn by St. John the Baptist, and St. John's vision of Christ "clothed with a long robe and a golden girdle round his breast" in Revelation 1:13.

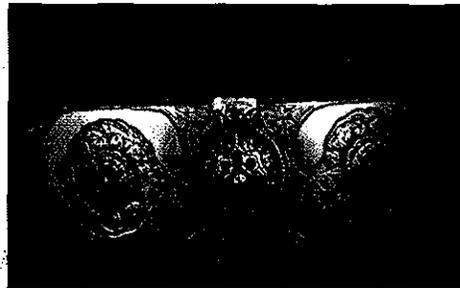


Sleeve.

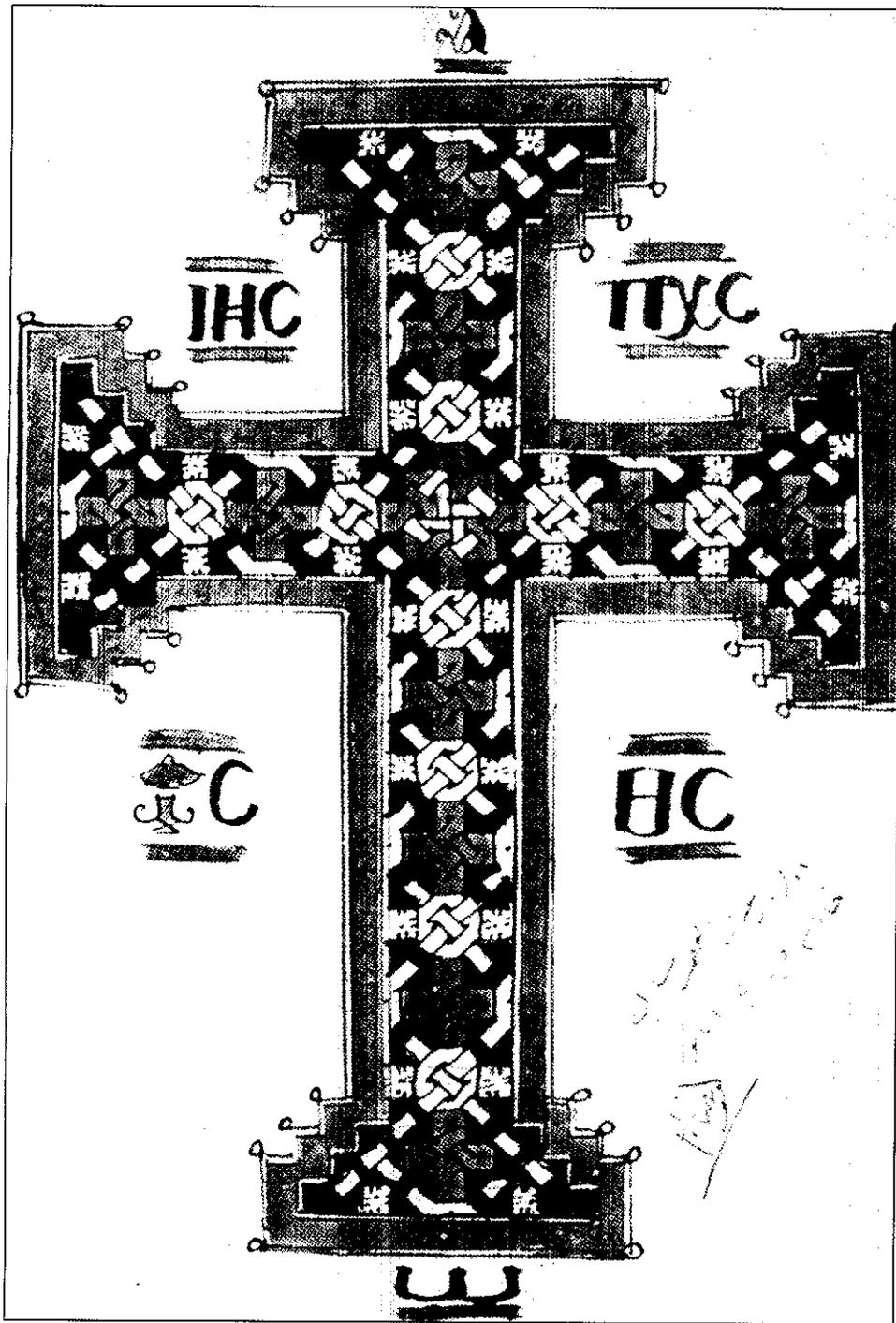
The Coptic Church was the first to use the girdle as a liturgical vestment.



Girdle.



Girdle.



"Each of the twelve months of the Coptic calendar still carries the name of one of the deities or feasts of ancient Egypt. Without doubt, this reflects the conservatism that characterizes the inhabitants of the Nile Valley."

COPTIC CALENDAR

The Coptic Church reckons the succession of years according to the 'Era of the Martyrs', which began in AD 284 with the reign of Diocletian, the emperor responsible for the Great Persecution. The division of the year follows the ancient Egyptian calendar with twelve months of 30 days and an epagomenal period, called al-Nasi (Arabic for 'the extension'), added at the end of the year. The 'little month' of al-Nasi has five days, except in leap year when it has six.

1. Tut	Sep 11 - Oct 10
2. Babah	Oct 11 - Nov 9
3. Hatur	Nov 10 - Dec 9
4. Kiyahk	Dec 10 - Jan 8
5. Tubah	Jan 9 - Feb 7
6. Amshir	Feb 8 - Mar 9
7. Baramhat	Mar 10 - Apr 8
8. Baramudah	Apr 9 - May 8
9. Bashans	May 9 - Jun 7
10. Ba'unah	Jun 8 - Jul 7
11. Abib	Jul 8 - Aug 6
12. Misra	Aug 7 - Sep 5
13. Al-Nasi	Sep 6 - Sep 10

In leap year, 22 Amshir falls on 29 February. Each Coptic day is then put back one until an extra day is added in al-Nasi (10 September), which restores the concordance of the Coptic and Gregorian calendars.

Fasting is strictly observed by the Copts. The total number of their fasting days covers approximately two-thirds of the year or a minimum of 250 days. In their fasts, the Copts avoid meat and all animal extracts including eggs, milk, butter, and cheese. Fish is also prohibited in the fasts of Jonah, Our Lady and Lent.

1. Weekly: Wednesday and Friday.
2. Lent (55 days before Easter, which falls a week after Western Easter).
3. Fast of the Nativity (43 days before Christmas on 29 Kiyahk).
4. Fast of the Apostles (from the Monday after Pentecost until the feast of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul on 5 Abib. The length varies between 15 and 40 days).
5. Fast of Jonah (3 days starting on the second Monday before the beginning of Lent).
6. Fast of the Holy Virgin (15 days before the Feast of the Virgin on 16 Misra).
7. Fasting on Christmas eve and the eve of Epiphany (11 Tubah).

The feasts observed by the Coptic Church may be divided into five main groups: the seven major feasts of Our Lord, the seven minor feasts of Our Lord, the seven Marian feasts, miscellaneous feasts (such as Coptic New Year on 1 Tut), and the individual feast days of the saints and the martyrs.

NOTES

- P. 8 - "Others, whose opinion,"
White, *Christian Lives*, 75
- P. 9 - *Life of St. Paul* by St. Jerome,
White, *Christian Lives*, 70-84
- P. 10 - "Be glad and rejoice,"
Shenouda, *Liturgy*, 107
- P. 11 - Church under Demetrius I,
Frend, *Persecution*, 351
- P. 12 - Christian majority in Egypt,
Frend, *Persecution*, 452
- "at times a hundred men,"
Eusebius (9. 9), 337
- P. 13 - "Desert full of monks,"
Athanasius, *Life* (14), 14
- "Two natures," Atiya,
Eastern Christianity, 69
- P. 14 - "The soldiers cut open,"
Budge, *Saints*, 908
- P. 15 - St. Hippolytus quoted in Frend,
Persecution, 376
- Lactantius quoted in Frend,
Persecution, 521
- P. 16 - SS. Cyriacus and Julitta,
Husselman, 80-81
- "placed the icon on the saint's,"
Drescher, *Apa Mena*, 142-143
- P. 17 - "Ask a child of three,"
O'Leary, *Saints*, 116
- P. 18 - Icons of St. Abiskhirun, see
Atalla, *Icons*, 59 and 97, and
Atalla, *Coptic Egypt*, 53
- "If my own family treats me,"
O'Leary, *Saints*, 161
- P. 19 - Dragon-slaying equestrian,
see Leroy, 329, and
Meinardus, *18th cent.*, 190
- Icon of St. Julius of Aqfahs,
see Atalla, *Icons*, 61
- Icon of Theodore the Oriental,
see Atalla, *Icons* 1, 117
- P. 20 - "So Antony, wishing to,"
Maqrizi in Evetts, 306
- P. 21 - "Every soul," Clement quoted
in Malone, *Monk*, 206.
- Monks as Martyrs,
see Malone, *Monk*, and
Frend, *Early Church*, 188-90
- "If thou wilt be perfect,"
Matthew 19:21
- "And having journeyed,"
Athanasius, *Life* (49-50), 38-39
- P. 22 - He longed for martyrdom,"
Athanasius, *Life* (46), 36-37
- "A monk ought to tell,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 9
- "Do not trust in your own,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 2
- "Strive with all your might,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 10
- P. 24 - "Do no evil to anyone,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 133
- "We have brought nothing,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 131/137
- "Cut out some stones here,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 134-136
- P. 25 - "A brother committed,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 138-139
- P. 26 - "Water it every day,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 85-86
- "It was said" / "It was also said,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 12/140
- P. 27 - "The just, the perfect,"
Moftah, *Liturgy*, 552
- "When he was eighty years,"
Russell, *Lives*, 70
- P. 28 - "Within the desert,"
Evetts, *Churches*, 167
- P. 29 - "the place where the blessed,"
Sulpicius Severus (XVII), 32
- "600 flourishing monasteries,"
Sawirus/Evetts (1.4), 72
- Early Monastery of St. Paul,
Vivian, 29-31
- Pilgrim of Placentia,
Meinardus, *Monks*, 35
- P. 30 - "Copts are the noblest,"
Evetts, *Churches*, 99-100
- Monastic fortifications,
Vivian, 30-31
- Abu Makarim on St. Antony's,
Evetts, *Churches*, 160
- Abu al-Makarim on St. Paul's,
Evetts, *Churches*, 166-167
- P. 31 - "of the same habit,"
Meinardus, *Monks*, 36
- *Geographica* of Breydenbach,
Meinardus, *Monks*, 36
- P. 33 - "This far convent has scarcely,"
Butler, *Coptic Churches*, 346
- P. 34 - "a terrible wilderness,"
Meinardus, *Monks*, 43

- "is enclosed by lofty,"
Meinardus, *Monks*, 39
- "lies near a spring,"
Maqrizi in Evetts, 307
- "the wild spot," Tattam (1839),
in Meinardus, *Monks*, 39
- P. 37 - "The windlass was turned,"
Meinardus, *Monks*, 41
- "The natives of the desert,"
Meinardus, *Monks*, 39
- "They pulled us up," Sicard, 40
- P. 38 - Keep construction, Mallinson, 6
- P. 39 - "Secret of the Crows,"
Meinardus, *Monks*, 44
- P. 41 - Whenever a church is depicted,
Butler, *Coptic Churches*, 6
- P. 42 - "The church," Coppin, 236-7
- P. 46 - "The walls," Sicard, 41
- P. 47 - "There appeared," Sawirus/
Khater, IV.1 (1974), 48
- P. 48 - "Rejoice," Moftah, *Liturgy*, 391
- "Seven Archangels praising,"
Shenouda, *Liturgy*, 44
- P. 50 - Early paintings,
see van Moorsel, *Iconography*
- "Seraphim with six wings,"
Moftah, *Liturgy*, 376
- "O messenger of good tidings,"
Shenouda, *Liturgy*, 119
- P. 52 - St. Mercurius and Ibrahim
al-Jawhari, Grossman
cited in Mallinson, 2
- P. 53 - Higab sanctuary screen,
Butler, *Coptic Churches*, 28-29
- P. 55 - "Angel of the Desert,"
Immerzeel, *Art*, 285
- P. 56 - "Just as fish die if they stay,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 3
- P. 57 - "Dying daily we shall not sin,"
Athanasius, *Life* (19), 16
- "He who wishes to live,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 3
- "Get thee gone,"
Budge, *Wit*, 19-20
- Prayer became contemplation,
Daniélou and Marrou, 272
- "Do this and you will be saved,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 1-2
- "Whoever has not experienced,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 2
- "The cell of a monk is like,"
Budge, *Wit*, 18
- "Monastery is like a garden,"
Budge, *Wit*, 195
- P. 59 - "If a man endures fasting,"
Budge, *Wit*, 23
- "Some have afflicted their,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 3
- "I prefer the man who eats,"
Budge, *Wit*, 29
- "The elders have tried fasting,"
Budge, *Wit*, 29
- "They live on coarse bread,"
Meinardus, *Monks*, 39-40
- "Eat moderately," Budge, *Wit*, 26
- "Be quiet," Ward, *Sayings*, 69
- "I consider," Ward, *Sayings*, 23
- "Abba Moses did not keep,"
Ward, *Sayings*, 139
- A monk prayed, Budge, *Wit*, 375
- P. 65 - Tectonic movement,
Abu al-Izz, *Landforms*, 234
- "They have a legend,"
Maqrizi in Evetts, 307
- P. 67 - Library survey of Simaykah,
Coquin, *CE* 3, 742
- P. 73 - Exercises beneficent power,
Langen, *CE* 4, 1276
- All quotes: Second Council of
Nicaea (787), Ouspensky, 135
- P. 74 - Coptic icons, Zusanna Skalova,
personal communication
- P. 76 - "In the churches," Ibn Siba' in
Langen, *Icon-Painting*, 64
- P. 77 - Scholars, Immerzeel, 287
- P. 78 - Ibrahim, Yuhanna and Anastasi,
Immerzeel, *Art*, 278-279
- Standard of living, Winter, 221
- P. 79 - Isaac Fanous,
Immerzeel, *Art*, 279-280
- P. 80 - Eucharistic objects, Basilios,
CE 4 1063-1066; *CE* 5 1469-1474
- P. 81 - "The censer of gold is,"
Moftah, *Liturgy*, 146
- P. 86 - "wore a cowl," Sozomen, 292
- P. 87 - "like the angelic choir,"
Ward in Russell, 25
- Vestments, Basilios, *CE* 5, 1475
- "Graciously," Basilios, *CE* 5, 1475
- P. 90 - "Each of the twelve months,"
Wissa Wassef, *CE* 2, 438
- P. 91 - Calendar, O'Leary, *Saints*, 34
- Fasts, Basilios, *CE* 5, 1093
- Feasts, Basilios, *CE* 5, 1101

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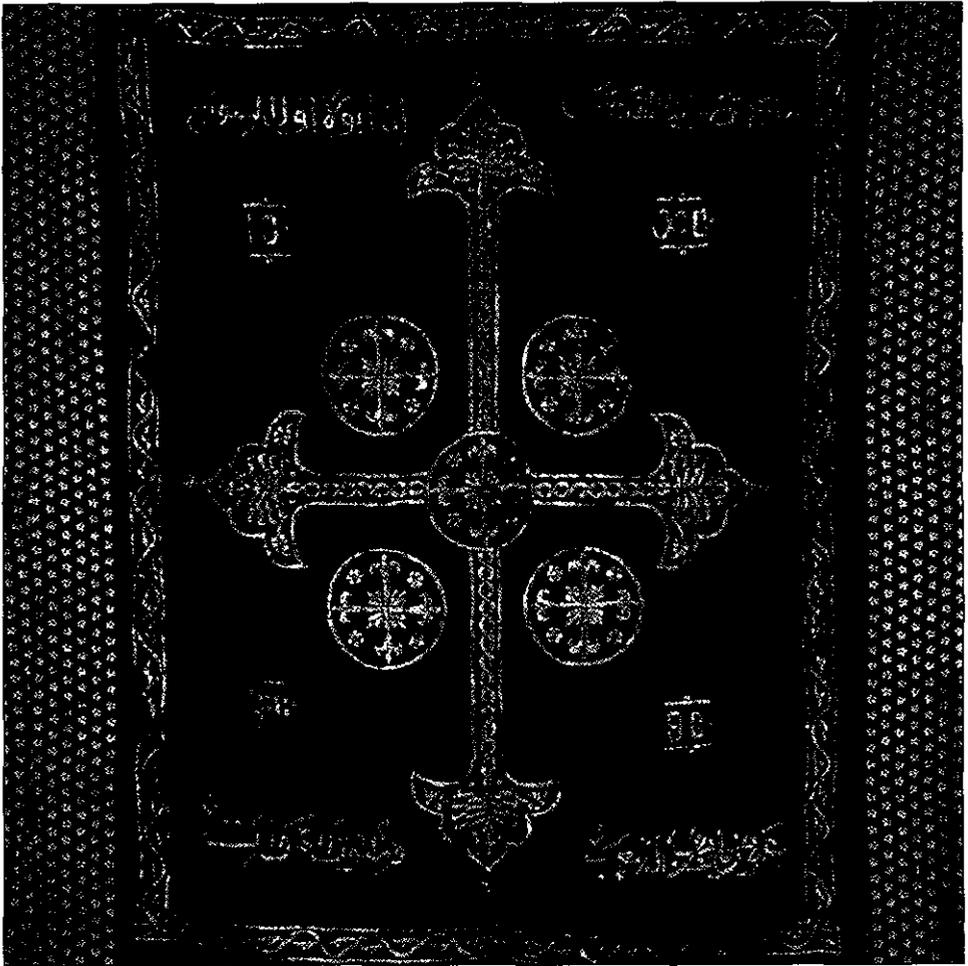
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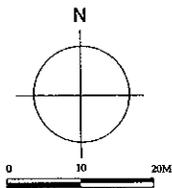


An embroidered altar veil used to cover the paten and chalice.

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MONASTERY OF ST. PAUL



Wadi

