CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION IN EGYPT UP TO THE ARAB CONQUEST (640/642)

BY

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# INTRODUCTION
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CHAPTER ONE.

CHRISTIANITY IN EGYPT.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the contribution of Egypt to Christianity, for in spite of the difficulties that the religion met with there, and the comparatively short period when it was really tolerated, Egypt in more than one sense, had an outstanding legacy to Christian history. Before the end of the second century of our era, there flourished in Alexandria, the Greek-speaking capital, a school of thought which tried to formulate the Christian teachings on the model of Greek philosophic speculation, and it was there, to put it in the words of Gibbon\(^1\), "that the Christian theology appears to have assumed a regular and scientific form." Later on, several of its Patriarchs played an important part in the Church Councils, and helped in defining the "true" faith. About the middle of the third century Egypt, as distinct from Alexandria, produced the first pioneers of monasticism, whose influence extended to the whole of Christendom, and thus started a movement which was destined to achieve far-reaching results.

(a) THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY.

The history of the infancy of Christianity is everywhere obscure. The journeys of the Twelve are mostly unhistorical and surrounded by legend. We do not even know the origin of the

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three oldest Churches: Rome, Alexandria and Antioch. It must be remembered, however, that in the Apostolic Age, Christianity was only one of several cults practised in the various provinces of the Roman Empire. Its adherents were scattered here and there, and there was nothing really particular about them to attract much attention from the historians of the age. At any rate, it is certain that the new religion soon spread all over the Mediterranean basin and the lands immediately adjacent to it. Apart from the missionaries, the constant movement of people from place to place in a highly commercial age, carried the Christian teachings in all directions. Already in the time of the New Testament, made up of documents of the first and early second centuries, there were important Christian centres in Rome, Asia Minor, Syria and other places.

As regards the Church of Alexandria, little is known of its history in the first two centuries. We hear of an early missionary called Apollos¹, an Alexandrian Jew by birth, who made extensive journeys preaching the Gospel, but we do not know if, after his travels, he returned to his native city, nor is it certain whether he acquired his Christianity in Alexandria or somewhere else. Alexandria at that time had a big Jewish community, which was no doubt in close contact with Jerusalem, and it was from among these Jews that the first converts in Alexandria were recruited.

The Coptic Patriarch is considered a successor, in a direct line, of St. Mark, from whom the Coptic Church claims its

St. Mark is said to have come there in the first years of Claudius (A.D.41/4), gathered followers and founded churches. Strangely enough, Clement, Origen and the early writers are completely silent about that.

The tradition does not appear till the time of Eusebius, who is merely reporting a popular tradition. Eusebius also mentions that Annianus was the first bishop of Alexandria after St. Mark, and that he succeeded him in the eighth year of Nero (A.D.61-2), which would make St. Mark bishop of Alexandria for about twenty years. Since Eusebius does not mention his death, it seems that St. Mark appointed Annianus as his successor before leaving for Pentapolis. At any rate there is strong evidence that in the very early period, Christian communities of some numerical importance existed, especially among the Greek-speaking portion of the population in Alexandria, and there were also some converts from the non-Greek population. But no architectural remains in Alexandria can go back to this period, and at any rate it is unlikely that a typical church architecture had as yet emerged into being. It is more likely that the Christians used whatever buildings were available for their worship.

Some teachings of Christianity were no innovation to the Egyptians, and could be easily identified with the practices of

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(1) Eusebius: Historia Ecclesiastica, II,16
(2) Ibid. II,24
the ancient cults. The belief in a second life, with rewards for the good and punishment for the bad, for example, was deeply rooted in the minds of the Egyptians. For that purpose, it was necessary to mummify the body and to preserve it intact. At the early period it was the custom to carry these mummies up the Nile for burial, with wooden labels, or tesserae, tied round the neck, carrying the name of the deceased and the place assigned for his burial. A large number of these tesserae have been found and are preserved in the museums. St. Athanasius, in his "Life of St. Anthony," also mentions that it was the custom — taken of course from the pagans — to keep the remains of martyrs in the houses, as a reminder to the faithful.

The main cult among the natives, as well as the Graeco-Roman population, at the appearance of Christianity, was that of Osiris and Isis. Here the resemblance to Christianity is very striking indeed: Osiris, too, was man and God; he had been slain by the powers of Evil, but certain ceremonies enabled his body to escape corruption, and he lived again in the other world as "King of the Dead." Moreover, the cult demanded from its adherents asceticism and abstention from the desires of the flesh, which are remarkable characteristics of the early Christian communities in Egypt.

That does not mean that Christianity quickly replaced the old religion, for in fact paganism lingered on even in Alexandria itself, as will be seen later on, and we are able to trace its influence on the future development of Egyptian Christianity.

(3) W. M. F. Petrie: Religion and Conscience in Early Egypt, London, 1898, p. 46.
Various early Christian writings have been ascribed to Alexandria or Egypt: the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of Barnabas, the so-called Second Epistle of Clement of Rome, the Didache. Besides, we hear of such uncanonical gospels as the "Gospel according to the Egyptians" and the "Gospel according to the Hebrews," which were probably for the use of the Gentile and Jewish branches of the Church of Alexandria. In this early period there were various tendencies in the Egyptian Church which were considered heretical and it was not till the time of Clement that it is possible to trace the development towards Orthodoxy. The Gnostics certainly exercised a great influence. We do not know definitely when or where Christian gnosticism started. De Faye assigns its beginning to the early second century, and its influence on the Church was felt about the middle of the century. There is plenty of evidence to show that its doctrines were widespread among the early Christian communities of Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor and elsewhere in the East. Judging by the amount of Gnostic literature coming from there, it is clear that Egypt must have had at least some share in its development. It is almost

(4) E. de Faye: Clement d'Alexandrie, Paris, 1886, p. 133.
impossible to arrive at the precise meaning of the various Gnostic doctrines, but all had one thing in common: that knowledge is beyond ordinary human conception and is only attainable by those endowed with the mysterious "Gnosis." It will perhaps suffice to mention the most important work "Pistis Sophia" (i.e., Faith - Wisdom), a treatise on repentance in the form of questions and answers between Christ and his male and female disciples, written between A.D. 250 and 300, and included in the so-called Askew Codex, dated fifth or sixth century. This is one of the three codices containing the greatest part of Gnostic literature, which has been preserved.

The two best known Gnostic teachers are Basilides and Valentinus, who are also the first definite names connected with the history of Christianity in Egypt. Both taught in Alexandria in the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 119-138). The first was born at Antioch but founded a school at Alexandria c. A.D. 130. He wrote a great commentary on the Gospel, probably the first of its kind. Valentinus, together with Heracleon, also wrote a commentary on the Gospel of St. John.

The writings of the New Testament, and especially the Fourth Gospel, were transformed into Gnostic documents by means of allegorical commentaries. The question of the Fourth Gospel, and the attention paid to it by the Fathers of the Egyptian Church, is particularly interesting: it was highly looked upon

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(1) Ibid.
(2) Creed, op. cit., p. 312.
(3) De Faye, op. cit., p. 123.
(4) Creed, op. cit., p. 514.
by Clement, Origen and still more by Athanasius. The earliest evidence for the Gospel's existence seems to be the Rylands and Egerton Papyri, found in Egypt, and assigned by the publisher to some date earlier than A.D. 150. Thus it seems that the Gospel was known to the Christians in Egypt early in the second century, and in fact Sanders\(^2\) gives Alexandria as the place where it might have been written,\(^3\) and argues that the hesitation of the Church in general to accept it in the early period may be due to the suspicion with which certain tendencies were looked upon in the Church of Alexandria.

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(2) op. cit., pp. 36-46.
(c) THE ALEXANDRIAN CATECHEtical SCHOOL.

For nearly a thousand years (330 B.C. - A.D. 640), Alexandria stood at the head of the learned world. Since its foundation it attracted scholars from all directions and soon replaced Athens itself as the centre of scientific study. Its philosophical schools mingled Greek thought with Jewish and Oriental ideas and produced Neo-Platonists and Gnostics, both of whom influenced and were influenced by Christianity. The main focus of intellectual Christian life there soon became the Catechetical School. The origin of this school is not known. According to Eusebius, it was founded in the earliest days of the community but became famous under Pontaenus. In a centre of learning such as Alexandria, it was necessary to revise and amplify the Christian creed in the light of other systems of thought, in order that it might hold its ground against such philosophies as the Stoic or the Platonic. The conversion of scholars required convincing argument from teachers endowed with the keenest intellectual power and of the highest knowledge. Thus need produced the school. It is important to notice that it grew up side by side with the Church, but not as part of it, or strictly under its authority, nor was it purely ecclesiastical: the staff were not all from the clergy. It was only when Bishop Demetrius appointed Origen as head of the School, c. A.D. 203, that the teachers lost a bit of their freedom. We know very little about its management.

(1) H.E., V., 10.
(2) De Faye, op. cit., pp. 23-34.
under Pontaenus and Clement. All we know is that there were no class-rooms, it was supported by voluntary gifts, the teacher gave informal lectures in his house, and the pupils were taught moral discipline and philosophy.

Pantaenus, the first head of the school of whom we have definite information (and incidentally this is also our earliest definite information about the Egyptian Church) is said by Eusebius to have been a Stoic. With him begins the history of the school. He was learned in Greek philosophy, travelled much in the East and in the reign of Commodus, shortly after A.D. 180, became in charge of the school. He is known to us through the writings of his pupil Clement.

We do not know the precise year or birthplace of Clement. He was born about the middle of the second century, of a pagan family, most likely at Athens. He, too, travelled widely, studied in Greece, Italy and the East before coming to Alexandria c. 180, where he became head of the school, c. 190. He remained there until he was compelled by the persecution of Severus (A.D. 202/3) to leave Alexandria.

Clement was an ardent and orthodox Christian; he was a humanist, and an admirer of classical literature. His study of the Bible was deep. His greatest achievement was the fusion of Platonism and Stoicism in a Christian mould, for his method was eclectic, and he made use of philosophy to arrive at the truth, but his main weakness was that, like the Greek philosophers,

(1) H.E., V., 10. 
(2) De Faye, op. cit., p.17. 
he made truth unattainable except to a few; behind the texts of the Bible, there was a mystical meaning, hidden from the eyes of the ordinary and understandable only by those who have the "gnosis."

His three major works are the "Protreptikos," in which he urges pagans to become Christians; the "Paedagogos," as the name indicates, a guide to Christians as to their conduct, and the "Stromateis" or miscellanies, a more advanced instruction to religion.

The work of Clement was carried on by his pupil Origen, one of the greatest figures of the Christian Church. Born c.A.D. 185, probably in Egypt, Origen was brought up in a Christian family, and we hear that he received instruction on the Bible from his father Leonidas. During the persecution of Severus, in which Leonidas was imprisoned and put to death, the School of Alexandria seems to have been at a standstill, since Clement had left and no one took his place. So, informally, Origen undertook to give instruction in the Christian Faith to those who sought it, till Demetrius, the bishop, confirmed him as head of the School, though he was still eighteen. Under him there was a great revival, for he is no doubt the father of systematic theology and Biblical criticism. The church is indebted to him more than to Clement. In the early period he seems to have concentrated on the study of Scripture, on which he wrote many commentaries, but later on, both in Alexandria and in Caesarea, where he had to withdraw in 231, he followed the tradition of

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his predecessors in supplying philosophy to the service of the Church. In 815 he was compelled, by mob violence, to leave Egypt, and for some time taught in Caesarea, even preaching in churches, till he was recalled back to Alexandria. Once more his relations with Demetrius became strained, and he had to leave in 231, to spend the last twenty years or so of his life in Syria and Palestine. He died in the Decian persecution of 250. Origen's bold speculative system was not always favourably received in Church circles. In his lifetime he was condemned by an Egyptian Synod, and after his death his views were strongly opposed and criticized by able writers. At the end of the fourth and during the fifth and sixth centuries, controversy raged over Origen, whose adherents were still numerous, but eventually his writings were condemned as heretical, but that will be dealt with later on.

These are not the only outstanding names in the history of the Alexandrian School; people like Heracleon and Dionysius are of no less importance. To them all the church owes a great debt. The School lost its importance during the Arian controversy; Arius himself was a catechist, though not head of the School. It was destroyed during the troubles of Theophilus with the monks.

(1) Latourette; op.cit., p. 149 f.
(2) Creed; op.cit., p. 304.
(3) For his works, see the Dictionary of Christian Biography, vol.IV, pp.96 f.
(4) Theodoret: H.E., I, l.
(5) Infra., p. 21 f.
(d) RELATIONS WITH ROME AND BYZANTIUM.

As soon as Christianity began to have the upper hand in the country, the Egyptian Church started an almost continuous series of struggles, in most cases a struggle for survival, with the Imperial Power. Hardly any Christian community can claim to have fought for its beliefs as did the Copts.

The first general attack upon Christianity was made by Decius (A.D. 249-251). There may have been occasional attempts during the second century to suppress the new religion, but they were mostly of a local type and on a small scale. Decius now gave orders that all his subjects should make sacrifices to the pagan gods, and to get a certificate from the magistrate to that effect. Many certificates of this kind have been found in Egypt. Sacrifice to the gods implied, as well, loyalty to the Emperor, who had among his functions to act as Pontifex Maximus. Christianity was becoming a rather disturbing element in Egyptian politics. Immediately before the Decian persecution, Origen had openly defied the Imperial authority by declaring that Christ was stronger than the Emperor, the Senate or the Roman people. He looked for the day when pagan cults should disappear with all their practices.

During the reign of Galienus, the Church enjoyed a period of peace and the Christians were left to exercise their religion without interference. They may have started to build churches at that time, and a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, dated at about A.D. 300,

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(1) Eusebius: H.E., VI, 41.
mentions some churches. However, most of them were soon destroyed by the order of Diocletian (285-305), under whom there was a fierce struggle between the Church and the Imperial Government. In the first years of Diocletian the Christians were tolerated and we are told that churches for public worship were erected in almost every city, but early in 303 an edict was issued requiring the churches in all provinces of the Roman Empire to be destroyed, with punishment of death to those who continued to worship in secret. The magistrates were instructed to collect all religious books and burn them in public, while the property of the church was confiscated.

Diocletian, it seems, wanted to adopt the magnificence and ceremonial of Oriental Courts, and the government was trying to give the Emperor a more distinctly religious position in the hope that his life might thus be more secure than that of the military Emperors of the last century. In Egypt, where the idea of deifying the Sovereign had been followed since the time of the Pharaohs, and was preserved by Alexander, the Ptolemies and the early Roman Emperors, the opposition of the Christians was unexpectedly obstinate. Their resistance was almost fanatic, and all over the country the number of martyrs, from all classes, was great. It is remarkable that the Coptic Calendar, "The Era of the Martyrs," starts from this stormy period.

(1) Grenfell and Hunt: Oxyrhyncus Papyri, I, 43.
(3) Eus.: H.E., VIII, 2 f.
(6) Eus.: H.E., VIII, 8.
14.

Diocletian decided to abdicate in the twenty-first year of his reign, but the persecution of the Christians was carried on by Galerius (305-311), and even more by Maximinus (305-313). The Edict of Milan in 313 put an end to persecution and brought peace to the Church. But no sooner had the Egyptians been relieved of their struggle with the State than they got involved in sectarian quarrels, which were of far-reaching results, since besides the theological question, their political consequences profoundly affected the history of their church. The first symptoms of the new trouble arose as a result of the teachings of Arius, a presbyter of the Church of Baucalis in Alexandria, on the relationship between the Father and the Son.

The Council of Nicaea: Arius himself was a Libyan by birth, and became deacon, then presbyter, in Alexandria. He was a pupil of Lucian, the most famous Christian scholar at the beginning of the fourth century, and the founder of the theological academy at Antioch. In fact it is a matter of doubt whether Arianism should be traced back to Antioch or to Alexandria. Harnack asserts that Antioch was the birthplace of the Arian doctrine and that Lucian was "Arius before Arius." At any rate it was in Alexandria that the dispute arose, and it was there that Alexander, then Athanasius, declared war on it. We do not know exactly how and when the trouble started, but it was soon after Alexander began his episcopate in 313. Alexander seems at first to have shown little eagerness to take action against his heretical presbyter, allowing him to

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(1) Milne: op. cit., p. 88.
gather followers. However, in 320 or 321 a synod was held in Alexandria which was attended by about a hundred bishops from Egypt and Libya. It resulted in the excommunication of Arius, some presbyters and deacon of Alexandria, and also the Libyan bishops Theonas and Sencundus. Arius settled for a while in Nicomedia, but soon returned to Alexandria, perhaps owing to the interference of Eusebius of Caesarea, or merely due to political circumstances. At any rate his arrival turned the dispute into a fierce struggle. Both sides appealed to Constantine, who had just defeated Licinius and become master of the Roman Empire. The Emperor sent his adviser Hosios, bishop of Cordova, with a carefully written letter to both sides appealing to them to put aside their quarrels and help him restore peace to the Church. That having failed, the Emperor summoned a general council of the Church to deal with the matter. The council met at Nicaea in A.D. 325, and was attended, according to Athanasius, by three hundred bishops, including two representatives of the Roman bishop. Hosios had a strong influence throughout. There is no need to go through the long deliberations of the Council, nor the conflicting views put to it. It found no difficulty in condemning the teachings of Arius, and undoubtedly the

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(1) Ibid., p.9.  
(2) Milne, op.cit., p.89  
(3) Harnack, op.cit., p.50  
(4) Constantine seems to have presided over the opening meeting himself, then Hosios probably took over. See N.H. Baynes: Alexandria and Constantinople, Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, XII, 1926, p.153.  
Creed of Nicaea was a victory for the Alexandrian point of view. Yet that was not the end of Alexandria's troubles.

In 328 Athanasius succeeded Alexander in the Chair of St. Mark, and he soon got a letter from the Emperor directing him to receive back Arius in the church, after a written explanation that he had offered. Athanasius stubbornly refused to obey the order, and in a Synod at Tyre in 335 he in turn was deposed and banished.

On the death of Constantine in 337, Athanasius returned to Alexandria, by an edict of Constantine II, but with the death of his patron in 340 he was deposed once more. The Eastern Empire was assigned to Constantius, who was probably an Arian himself, and the Eusebian party met at Antioch in 341 and decreed that a bishop who had been removed by a synod could resume his functions only by the decree of another synod. So they chose Gregory to replace Athanasius. The supporters of the latter held the metropolitan church against the new bishop till the prefect Syrianus threatened to use force. Athanasius thought it wiser to withdraw and for three years he sought refuge with Constans, Emperor of the West, and Julius, bishop of Rome. In his absence his supporters in Alexandria kept up a continuous disturbance and succeeded in expelling the Arians from many monasteries and in

burning the metropolitan church, which was held by them.  
Clearly religion had become capable of stirring up a national rising. 
Constans eventually interfered to restore the exiled bishop to his seat, and under pressure Constantius accepted. Athanasius made a triumphal entry into Alexandria, while absence and persecution had increased his popularity.

It seems that Constantius had agreed to the return of Athanasius only under fear of a civil war with Constans, for as soon as the latter died another order of banishment was issued. The order was not put into effect for a long time, till Syrionus the General in Alexandria threatened to use force and even attacked Athanasius while he was heading the congregation in the church of St. Theonas. Athanasius does not seem to have left the country; he kept in hiding with his friends in spite of a close search for him. Meanwhile George of Cappacodia, the new bishop, found it necessary to rely on government support to strengthen the position of the Arians and to crush his opponents. 

The succession of a pagan Emperor, Julian (360/1), was the death-blow to George; he could no longer rely on the power of the Emperor, his persecution had made him most hateful to the Christians, and the Alexandrians in general felt offended by his suggestion of a tax on all the houses of the city - a tax to which they had never been subjected before. So far, whatever religious group was in

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(1) Ibid., 11; Milne: op. cit., p.91.
(3) Ibid., 26; Gibbon: op. cit., pp. 269-70.
power - Athanasian or Arian - in Alexandria, it could destroy or convert to Christian uses the pagan edifices of the city without fear of drawing the anger of the Government, and George was not slow in making use of that privilege. Now the pagans had an emperor on their side and they thought that the time had come for them to take revenge. They sent a deputation to Byzantium with complaints against the military commander and the bishop, both for proposing the house-tax and for destroying the temples. The first was summoned to the capital and executed and the second was ordered into prison obviously for misuse of authority. But the Alexandrians, impatient for his final condemnation, dragged him out to his death.

This tumult of Alexandria was tacitly approved by the Emperor who could only give orders that no such disturbance would be allowed in the future. Athanasius now appeared in triumph (A.D.362); his fame had extended beyond the boundaries of Egypt, and everywhere he was looked upon with respect and admiration. The Emperor first issued an order for his expulsion from Alexandria as one who had been condemned repeatedly by Emperors and had returned without permission. Then he wrote to the prefect threatening him with a fine if Athanasius was not expelled from all Egypt. Still it does not seem that Athanasius ever left the country, but to have retired to the desert monasteries.

(1) Ibid., 471.
(3) Milne: op. cit., p.92.
(5) Ibid., III, 4.
(7) See White: The History of the Monasteries, p.73.
During the reign of Jovian (363-4), who held to the Nicene Creed, Athanasius could come out and occupy the episcopal throne, but with the coming of Valens, an Arian, things changed again. The popularity of Athanasius indeed secured his position, until he died in A.D. 373, after a reign of 47 years, but his successor, Peter II, had to escape to Rome, and an Arian bishop, Lucius, was appointed and given military support. The Arians took this opportunity to seize all churches in Alexandria and started a campaign against the Monks of the Natrun Valley, who throughout the Arian dispute, had been the loyal supporters of Athanasius. The monasteries at that time had been attracting large numbers of people who wanted to escape the heavy burden of taxation, and civil responsibilities. This was seriously affecting the economic life of the country, and the government, therefore, decided to curtail the rights and privileges of monks. Hence, the support given to the Arians.

Theodosius the Great (378-395) wanted not only to put an end to paganism throughout the Empire, but also to get rid of Arianism. The Emperor gave orders to close all temples and in Egypt the decree was vigorously enforced. Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, himself lead the attack, and many temples including the Serapeum were destroyed.

THE ORIGENIST AND ANTHROPOMORPHIC CONTROVERSY

The bishops of Alexandria were gradually claiming

(1) Socrates: H.E., IV, 2. (2) White, op. cit., p. 77
(3) See White, op. cit., pp. 81 f.
for themselves more and more civil rights, encouraged, no doubt, by the interference of the emperors, since Constantine, in church affairs, until eventually they became the uncrowned kings of Egypt, with supreme authority over their subject. Thus in the dispute which arose in the Nitrian Monasteries concerning Origenism and Anthropomorphism, Theophilos led a body of soldiers to punish his opponents in the monasteries as if they were rebels against the State.\(^1\) Socrates gives a full account of the dispute.\(^2\) The majority of the Nitrian monks were Anthropomorphists, i.e., they believed that God was, literally, human in form. But there were a few intellectuals who took the Biblical references to the corporal form of the Deity only figuratively; a doctrine held by Origen, hence the group was believed, rightly or wrongly, to support all the teachings of Origen.\(^3\) Naturally they were regarded with suspicion by the close uneducated monks.

Shortly before 399 the situation in the Nitrian Monasteries became so acute that the intervention of the bishop became essential. Sosom\(^4\) says that in his Paschal letter of 399, Theophilos denounced the doctrine of Anthropomorphism, and on getting the letter the Nitrian monks rose in a riot and decided to go to Alexandria. The situation was very serious, and demanded great tact from Theophilos. He decided to put aside the question of Anthropomorphism for the time being, and

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(2) H.E., IV.
(3) Palladius: Hi t. Laus., XI.
(4) H.E., VIII, II.
in order to win over the monks, agreed to condemn Origen's views; \(^1\) this was duly done by a Synod held in Alexandria in 389 or 400. By this time Theophilus was already in trouble with the famous Tall Brothers; Ammonius, Dioscorus, Euthymius and Eusebius. The latter two had been attached in 395/6 to the Bishop who thought of exploiting the great popularity they enjoyed, \(^2\) but they soon discovered the unscrupulous tactics of Theophilus and decided to go back to the desert. That naturally brought upon them the anger of Theophilus, and with the official condemnation of Origenism, he decided to take action and stem all opposition to him in the monasteries.

It appears that the Emperors Arcadius and Honorius had shortly before this issued orders prohibiting the reading of Origen's works. Thus once Theophilus had brought the charge of Origenism against some of the monks, including the Tall Brothers, he could appeal to secular aid as well, though indeed his own followers were enough, \(^3\) and in a surprise attack, took full vengeance on the unprepared monks, causing a great disaster there, and scattering the population. We shall hear of the Tall Brothers again in Constantinople.

The exiled monks for a while wandered in Syria and Palestine; they were sure to get some support there, for the works of Origen always had their admirers there, and at that

\(^{(1)}\) Soc: H.E., VI, 17.
\(^{(2)}\) Ibid., 7.
\(^{(3)}\) See White: History of the Monasteries, p.140.
time they included people like Rufinus, Melania and Paula. At last the Origenist party headed for the Capital.

In 381 a council had met in Constantinople with neither Alexandria nor Rome represented. For Theodosius, trying to restore unity to the church, issued an edict commanding the whole Empire to adopt the creed of Nicaea, which he declared was the one accepted by the bishops of Rome and Alexandria. Meanwhile, in order that the Council might not be dominated by either of them, it was presided over by the bishop of Antioch. In its third canon, the Council assigned to the bishop of Constantinople the second place in the order of preference, only next to Rome, "because the city of which he is bishop is New Rome." Alexandria could not accept such relegation; it was recognised as the second city of the Empire at least as early as the middle of the third century. Athanasius had further increased its prestige everywhere by his defence of orthodoxy. Nor was Theophilus the type of person to keep quiet, and at once put his diplomacy to work.

On the death of Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople, in 397, Theophilus hoped to secure the chair for his own candidate, Isidorus, but the attempt was foiled by the all-powerful court favourite Eutropius. The second round in the struggle came when the Nitrian monks - with them the Tall Brothers - and the Origenists, arrived at Constantinople and appealed to Chrysostom for help. John received them kindly and wrote to Theophilus asking for a reconciliation.

When that proved fruitless, an appeal was made to Empress Eudoxia, together with several charges against the Alexandrian bishop.\(^1\) The Empress was already hostile to him.

Theophilus was summoned to Constantinople to stand trial, in front of a Synod presided over by Chrysostom, but he would not fall into the trap so easily. His agents were already in the Capital making intrigues against its bishop, and after some delay he went there himself accompanied by a large following. A council was convened in 403 at the Oak\(^2\), a suburb of Chalcedon, and not at Constantinople, perhaps from fear of Chrysostom's popularity there, or perhaps because Arodius was then resident at Antioch. The question at issue now was not the trial of Theophilus or the Tall Brothers, who in fact repented and were accepted back into Communion,\(^3\) but the deposition of Chrysostom himself. The latter must have disappointed the Emperor by his refusal to preside over the synod\(^4\) on the ground that it was held outside his See. Thus Alexandrian diplomacy was completely successful, and Chrysostom, instead of being the judge of his opponent, was condemned for refusing to appear before the synod.\(^5\)

Theophilus was succeeded in 412 by his nephew Cyril, who soon got into trouble with the Jews in Alexandria, \(\text{\textit{hence}}\) then an important part of the population. The reason of the conflict seems

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(1) Soz.: H.E., VIII, 15.
(3) Soc: H.E., VI, 16.
to have been the traditional hostility between Christians and Jews or perhaps it was the new Patriarch's ambition to eliminate paganism and Judaism from the city.¹ Socrates² gives an account of the events, from which it seems that the Prefect Crestes was completely disregarded, and even attacked. The Jews, it is said, had planned a night attack on the Christians, to which the latter retaliated. An army of monks from the Natrun Valley, now completely loyal to the bishop, came to Alexandria. The Jews were banished from the city and their property was plundered. Then followed the murder of Hypatia, daughter of Theon, a distinguished mathematician of the Museum, in the church of Caesarium.

THE NESTORIAN CONTROVERSY.

The unity of the church, effected in the Council of Constantiople in 331, on the basis of the Nicaean Creed, was short-lived. At Nicaea it had been declared that the Son is of the same substance as the Father. The question now arose as to how the divine substance in Christ could be united with His human nature.

In 427, in the reign of Theodosius II, Nestorius was appointed as bishop of Constantinople. Nestorius was a monk from Antioch, and held the view of its school which insisted upon the true humanity of Christ.³ He was opposed by the Alexandrian Church and at once the traditional war between the two rivals started. Cyril, appearing to be the holder of orthodoxy, wrote to Pope

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⁴ Ibid., pp. 176 f.
Celestine in Rome; in all these theological controversies, Rome had always been on the side of Alexandria.⁴ Nestorius also appealed to the Pope, but the latter, much under the influence of Cyril, accused Nestorius of heresy and declared that he must accept the views of Rome and Alexandria.⁵ A Roman Synod (430) threatened Nestorius with excommunication if he disobeyed and Cyril himself was charged with carrying out the decision.⁶ Anathemas and counter-anathemas were exchanged between Alexandria and Constantinople. Finally the Emperor summoned a council to meet at Ephesus in 431, to enquire into the conduct of the Patriarch of Egypt.⁷ The methods of terrorism and bribery adopted by Cyril, his refusal to await the arrival of John, bishop of Antioch, and his disregard of the Emperor's instructions, are all well known. Cyril became in fact the Council, as Nestorius said. The latter naturally did not appear before the council and as a result was condemned and thus disappeared from the scene. Cyril, too, died in 444, but the controversy went on.

THE MONOPHYSITE SCHISM.

In 446 Eutyches, abbot of a monastery near Constantinople, made another attempt to solve the problem. His doctrine, that the Nature of Christ after the Incarnation was single and not two-fold, rested on the authority of Cyril and Athanasius himself; that probably explains the attitude of the Egyptian church towards him.

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(1) Ibid., p.183.
(3) Harnack: op. cit., vol. IV., p.185.
(4) Ibid., p. 186.
He was accused of heresy by confusing or blending the divine and human natures of Christ, and was excommunicated by Flavius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, but Dioscurus at once sided with Eutyches. Cyril had played Pope against Emperor; now Dioscurus was even more daring; he defied both and relied solely on his powerful partisan Chrysaphius, minister of Theodosius II. ¹ Briefly, the Emperor summoned a council at Ephesus in 449 with Dioscurus in the Chair. Pope Leo the Great sent three delegates carrying his famous Epistle or Tome, addressed to Flavian, ² but Alexandria's supremacy, with Imperial support, completely overshadowed Rome. The proceedings of the council were so disgraced by the tactics of Dioscurus as to win it the name of the "Brigands' Council." The finding was that Eutyches was not heretical, and therefore his excommunication invalid. Flavian on the other hand was deposed. "Never before, at any council, had a Patriarch scored such a victory," says Harnack. ³ Alexandria, at last, seemed to have realised its dreams of supremacy in the East, but the death of Theodosius turned the tables round, especially with the fall of Chrysaphius too. The new Emperor Marcian, perhaps under the influence of his wife Pulcheria, summoned another council in 451. ⁴ It met at Chalcedon, and from the beginning was dominated by Leo, and Marcian, both determined to check the ascendancy of Alexandria. It condemned the doctrine of Eutyches, confirmed the Creeds of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus, to which it added only some more explanation included in Leo's letter. ⁵

(3) Ibid., p.207-10.
(4) Baynes: op. cit., p.155.
However, its formula of "two natures" had a provocative effect on men's minds throughout a large part of the East, and as soon as the "Definition of Chalcedon" was announced, it raised an enormous revolution in Syria and Egypt.

Dioscurus was deposed and banished to Gangra. His successor Proterius, the Imperial Patriarch as he might be called, after maintaining his position for a while by military aid, was murdered in 457 by an Alexandrian mob, soon after the death of Marcian. The Alexandrians chose a monk called Timotheus Aelurus as their Patriarch (457), but Emperor Leo I (457-74) refused the choice, banished him, and chose as his successor Timotheus Salophaciolus. From this time on, the division between Monophysites and Melkites was always maintained; the Patriarch chosen by either of them was not recognised by the other.

A conspiracy in the court for a short time brought Basiliscus to the throne (475-6). He issued a decree against the Creed of Chalcedon, and that enabled Aelurus to go back to his office, which he retained till his death in 477. Once more Timotheus Salophaciolus was reinstated in the Chair of St. Mark, but he soon died and the struggle over a successor started again.

The troubles in Egypt were causing a great deal of concern to the Government. The church of Alexandria now identified itself entirely with national sentiment, and it must be remembered, too, that the Council of Chalcedon had established the full supremacy of the Emperor in church affairs. A series of attempts was, therefore, made to reconcile the two parties.


(2) Bury: op. cit., vol. I, p.403
THE HENOTICON OF ZENO.

The first attempt to sacrifice Chalcedon for the sake of unity was made by Zeno in 484. He issued the Henoticon, or Edict of Union, a letter addressed to the Egyptian Church, which anathematized both Nestorius and Eutyches and emphatically affirmed the Faith of Nicaea and Constantinople, then it said: "If anyone has taught otherwise, whether at Chalcedon or elsewhere, let him be anathema."¹

The Henoticon caused a complete breach between Rome and Constantinople,² but in Egypt it was claimed as a triumph, especially when Peter Montus was restored to the patriarchal throne. He seized the opportunity and at once banished from the Egyptian Monasteries all monks who did not hold the Monophysite Creed. Peace was again restored by the death of Peter and the election of Athanasius II (490), and lasted until Justinian's unfortunate zeal for orthodoxy aggravated once more the old differences.³ This Emperor tried to maintain the Orthodox Church in Egypt by force. His first nominee as Patriarch in Alexandria, called Paul, was slain after two years. The second, Dalmius, remained for five years, then fled for his life, and when Justinian decided to handle the matter with a high hand, and invested his third nominee, Appolinarius (551) with temporal powers, the Egyptians flatly refused to have anything to do with him,⁴ and henceforth their elected Patriarch reigned from the Monastery of

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¹ Harnack: op. cit., vol. IV, p.228.  
⁴ Gibbon: op. cit., vol. V., pp.159-161.
St. Macarius, in the Natrun Valley, and held in his hands the spiritual government of the country. By the end of the sixth century the country was in a state of chaos, politically and economically.

In 611 Athanasius, bishop of Antioch, fled in front of the Persian invasion, and was received by Anastasius, the Coptic Patriarch, at the Ennaton Monastery, west of Alexandria. Other Syrian bishops, among them Thomas of Harkel and Paul of Tella, were already there working on a Syrian version of the Bible.

The Persians soon took Jerusalem, and sent its patriarch Zacharia, together with the True Cross, to Persia. Exhausted by maladministration and torn by internal strife, Egypt fell an easy prey to the Persians (616), and before they had reached Alexandria the Melkite Patriarch, John the Almsgiver, together with the Imperial General Niketas, had fled to Cyprus. Soon the Coptic Church was able to re-organise itself and recover from its wounds. Unlike John, the Coptic patriarch Andronicus remained in office throughout the Persian rule. His successor, the well-known Benjamin, was popular all over Egypt.

In 623, Heraclius started his crusade to regain the True Cross and won resounding successes. Under pressure, Persia withdrew her forces from Egypt, and again the country was occupied by the Romans. Heraclius could now make another attempt to unite the various sects of his Empire. His Patriarch Sergius produced for him a new

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(1) White: Hist. of the Monasteries, pp. 258 f.
(5) Butler: op. cit., pp. 82 f.
formula which was adopted in an Imperial edict, the "Bothesis," to serve as a basis for reunion. He proposed to meet the Monophysites halfway by recognising a single "energy" in Christ, operating through his two natures. By 633 it seemed that compromise had at last won over the Monophysites in Syria, Armenia and Egypt, but all was ruined by the obstinacy of one man, Sophronius, who in Egypt opposed the new formula propagated by Cyrus, the Melkite Patriarch. Sophronius (raised to the bishopric of Jerusalem in 634, undoubtedly in the hope of winning him over), uncompromisingly asserted that there were two "energies" in the one Christ. All was in dispute again, and the policy of Cyrus proved disastrous to the Emperor's plan. His arrival at Alexandria had already given the signal for the flight of Benjamin, and his fierce persecution of the Monophysites wrecked completely any hope he might have had of winning them over. However, the Arabs were on their way to invade the country; in 642 the Byzantine forces finally withdrew from Alexandria, and thus Egypt lost its connection with the universal Church.

E. MONASTICISM.

Asceticism, in various forms and different degrees, was already widespread in pre-Christian times. The tendency was particularly marked in Egypt just before the advent of Christianity. We hear of the "Katokoi," who lived in seclusion in many temples,

especially the Serapcium at Memphis, in the Ptolemaic period.¹

In the first century B.C. we hear also of the "Priests of Heliopolis" and of the "Gymnosophists," semi-monastic organisations that believed in abstinence and self-discipline.² Another important group was the "Theraputae," or "Healers," mentioned by Eusebius, who flourished in the Maryut district, to the south of Alexandria.³ That such practices exercised much influence on Christian monasticism cannot be proved⁴ and, anyhow, there was enough incentive in the teachings of Christ and the Apostles to encourage asceticism as a step towards the attainment of a higher life. It is almost certain that monasticism, as a Christian institution, came to birth in Egypt: not in Alexandria, but among the native Christians.

The earliest ascetics were solitaries; men seeking by themselves to save themselves. Some of them were hermits, or desert men; others merely withdrew to a hut or a cave on the outskirts of their village or town to devote themselves to religious exercises, though they were not completely cut off from the community. That was the example followed by St. Antony when he started his monastic life.⁵

Under the stress of the Decian persecution (250), a great number of Christians fled to the desert⁶ and lived there for a time in solitude. That was not the beginning of monastic life; most of them came back when the trouble was over, but some

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(6) Eus.: H.E. VI, 42.
preferred to stay there, among them Paul of Thebes, who settled in a cave near the Red Sea.\(^1\) Just before his death (c. 340) he was visited by St. Antony, the "Father of Monks." Thus Paul had no followers, and did not leave any organised community.

Antony\(^2\) was born in Middle Egypt of well-to-do parents, c. 250. He was illiterate, for he had no schooling. About 270 he became a hermit in his own town, like many others, living a life of austerity. Fifteen years later he decided to withdraw to the desert, and chose for his retreat a deserted fort at Psirir, on the east bank of the Nile, about fifty miles south of Memphis. There he lived in complete seclusion, but his example was followed by many others who came and settled nearby, and desired him to be their guide. Finally he consented to organize their numbers (c. 305), by preaching and guiding them as a father. It was not a monastery in the modern sense of the word, but a family-like community organised under the spiritual leadership of Antony. Having done that, Antony went back to his eremitical life; this time he went deep into the desert towards the Red Sea, till he settled at the foot of the "Im er Mountain," now known as Dain Mari Antonius.

In "The Life of St. Antony" we are told that he came to Alexandria twice: once in 310 or 311, to encourage those who were suffering for the faith under the persecution of Maximin Daia, and again at an extreme age (perhaps in 337) when he came to support

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Athenasius against the Arians.\(^1\)

By the end of the fourth century, the Antonian type of monasticism had spread all over Middle and Lower Egypt, but its development can best be studied in the settlements of the Mount of Nitria, Cellia and Scetis,\(^2\) and much influenced by Antony himself. There we find two types: the hermits who lived in the "Cells," and the semi-cenobites in Nitria who could either live separately or in groups. As said before, it was very informal, rather individualistic, everyone being left to his own discretion. The elders, who guided newcomers, relied on their wisdom and spiritual authority since there were no rigid rules for discipline.

About the same time as monasticism was spreading in the north, the monk Pachomius founded, unknown to Antony, his monasteries in the south, on completely different lines. His first monastery, at Tabennisi,\(^4\) near Abyin, was founded about 305, when he was still a young man, and by the time he died (c. 345), the number of monasteries had become eight. The work of Pachomius was not restricted to men; under the influence of his sister Mary, he organised nunneries as well.\(^5\)

The Pachomian order was based on strict organisation. The monasteries followed semi-military lines, obedience to the superior being required of all. They were divided into houses, with thirty

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\(^1\) Ibid: 46, 69; Soc., H.E., IV, 25.
\(^2\) C. Butler: op. cit., pp. 263-4; White: op. cit., p.17.
\(^3\) White: op. cit., pp. 45-69.
to forty monks, each practising a certain trade, by which the
monks could earn a living; basket and net making, carpentry,
dyeing, tanning, gardening etc., for it was deemed essential
that they should be a burden on nobody. They all gathered
for the more solemn offices only in the church, and otherwise
the monk could join in the common meal or have his food separately
as he preferred.

After Pachomius the greatest figure in the history of
Egyptian monasticism is Shenoudi of Atripe, who died c. 451, and
is known to us as one of the best writers in Sahidic Coptic, and
as a strict reformer. His activities centred round the White and
Red Monasteries near Sohag. He introduced a new element in
monasticism when he tried to combine the cenobitical life of
the Pachomian order with the austerities of the Nitrian monks.
Though little known in the west, he is said to have attended
the council of Ephesus in 431.

In Egypt, the monastic movement, in all its forms, met
with enormous success. From there it was introduced, at an early
date, by St. Basil into Greece, by St. Halarion into Syria, and
by St. Eugenius into Mesopotamia. It was not a long time before
it reached the West as well.

From this historical sketch we come out with certain

(1) Byzantium, p.137; C. Butler, op.cit., p.235.
(2) The Legacy of Egypt, p.320. See W.E. Crum: Coptic Monuments,
Cairo, 1902, 8007 a-c, 8113 for parts of his Epistles or Homilies.
conclusions. First, Christianity spread quickly throughout the Nile Valley, and for a while developed independently, free from foreign influence. The lines which it followed were different in Alexandria from the hinterland. In the first, the impact of Christianity, with its new ideas and ideals, was already felt in the second century, and at once it was subjected to the methods of investigation familiar to the hellenistic schools of philosophy in the city. In the second, the new religion encountered an old-established cult, and from the beginning it seems to have been influenced by native traditions. Thus it took a simple form, far from the subtlety of Alexandrian thought: monasticism is the best expression of this tendency.

This difference of approach was bound to cause a clash, and in fact it did, when the chance offered itself, in the Origenist and Anthropomorphic controversies. But Alexandria could not stay aloof from the rest of the country, nor could it altogether dominate it in the field of theology, so both began to interact on each other. The native-speaking Christians, finding difficulty with the ancient hieroglyphics, borrowed from Alexandria the Greek letters, on which the Coptic script was mainly based; on the whole they accepted the supremacy of its Patriarchs, and their definitions of the Faith, but these, too, were not unacquainted with the native trends in religion; Theophilus accepted the views of the monks about Origenism, admittedly for special reasons, but even Athanasius had been in close contact with Antony and thought highly of him. He sought his support against the Arians, and in time of trouble, himself took refuge in the monasteries. Cyril, we are told, was trained in the Nitrian
Monasteries, before he occupied the Chair of St. Mark.

Secondly, the Egyptian Church was no mere shadow of any other; on the contrary it soon developed its own theology, and powerful Patriarchs undertook to expound it. It never accepted the supremacy of Constantinople, and in the end rejected the claims of Rome, its close ally and supporter till the Council of Chalcedon. In all Church councils, the Alexandrian representatives never departed from their declared policy: they went there not to bargain or accept a compromise, but to put forward their interpretation of the faith, and make sure that the others accepted it. When that could not be attained at Chalcedon, for special circumstances, Dioscurus had no hesitation in separating from the main body of the church, rather than sacrifice his own principles.

This is not to deny the existence of some foreign elements. These found their way along two channels: one through Alexandria, from its foundation a cosmopolitan city with a population of mixed nationalities, while at the same time it remained in direct contact with the rest of the world. Soon another link established itself: namely, when monasticism made Egypt a second Holy Land, not only attracting admirers from everywhere, but devotees who decided to settle there. The next step was to establish monasteries, modelled on the Egyptian ones, in other countries. The connection with the East seems to have been always strong, particularly with Syria and Palestine. Apart from being neighbours, the methods of thinking were traditionally akin, especially when Alexander removed the boundaries between them and subjected them to Greek civilisation. Also the Holy Lands always had their special place among the Egyptians and were looked upon with the greatest admiration. It
is strange that Origen, when driven out of Alexandria, carried on his work in Syria and Palestine, instead of going to Rome or Greece, where he might have been more at home. After the Monophysite Schism, the Egyptian Church found its only allies in Syria and Palestine.

Finally, from 451 onwards, an official Patriarch was maintained by force in Alexandria, and he must have had a small following, but even when Justinian invested him with temporal power, his influence hardly extended beyond the boundaries of the city. The real authority lay in the hands of the native Patriarch.
CHAPTER TWO

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE.

It was probably Strzygowski who first directed attention to the difference between the architecture of the coastal regions in Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt and that of the hinterland. On the whole, the first were more influenced by the Graeco-Roman world, while the latter preserved, to a greater extent, a distinctly native character. His conclusions have been confirmed, with regard to Egypt, in more recent years, by the researches of two brilliant scholars: Ernest Kitzinger, choosing sculpture as his medium, and Ward Perkens, working on both architecture and architectural ornament. We can thus divide the Christian remains of Egypt into two categories:

A. Alexandria, the capital, with its cosmopolitan connections, and its strong classical traditions.

B. Egypt proper, whose architecture is completely different from the ancient Pharaonic, yet hardly any closer to the Early Christian architecture of other regions.

A. ALEXANDRIAN CHURCHES.

It is most unfortunate that the great erections of Athanasius, Theophilus and Cyril have almost completely disappeared. At the beginning of the last century, when Mohammed Aly embarked on his scheme of reviving the city, Alexandria had dwindled to a small town

with a few thousand inhabitants. Whatever remains may have survived till then, were soon removed to make room for the expansion of the new city.¹ Literary sources give us the names of many churches that once existed there, but they say nothing about their architecture or general lay-out. It is even difficult to assign the position of most of the churches we hear of, for the topography of the city itself has greatly changed, with the sea gaining in some parts and losing in others, especially before the present sea-wall was built at the beginning of this century.²

According to the "History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria,"³ when St. Mark returned to Alexandria, after two years in Pentapolis, he was pleased to find a flourishing Christian community which had built a church in the place called Bausalis, near the sea. But it is doubtful if a church could actually have been built at such an early date, for the Christians were hardly in a position to do so.

The most famous of the Alexandrian churches, and probably the first to be built there, was the oratory undertaken by Bishop Theonas (c. 282-300) near the shore of the Eunostos harbour. It was reconstructed and much enlarged by Alexander (313-326) and from this time till about the end of the fourth century, used as the Cathedral and residence of the Bishop. The Roman troops attacked Athanasius there while leading the congregation in prayer in 365.⁴ It lost much of its importance in the sixth century, when

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¹ E. Breccia: Alexandria ad Aegyptum, Bergamo, 1922.
⁴ See Chapter I, d.
the Caesarium was used as the Cathedral. Finally the Arabs
turned it into a mosque which was known as Gimi' El-Gharbi
(the Western Mosque), or the Mosque of the Thousand Pillars.¹
This probably indicates a basilican plan.

The Caesarium, mentioned by Pliny (Historia Naturalis,
XXXVI, 14, 8), by Dion Cassius (LI, 15), by Philo of Alexandria
(De Virtute et Legat. ad Gaium, 2) and by others, was started
in the last days of Cleopatra in honour of Antony, finished
under Augustus and dedicated to the Emperor's worship, hence
the name Sebastium. It was turned into a church after the
Peace of the Church, though it preserved the old name, Caesarium.
After having undergone several destructions and restorations,
Athanasius at last undertook a complete rebuilding about 368, in
the time of Valens, and from then until the Arab Conquest, it
became the Cathedral Church.²

In 370, Athanasius consecrated a church, which carried
his name, in the district called Bendidion, or Mendidion. It
was considered second in greatness only to that of Theonas, and
contained a large number of ancient columns in marble and granite.³

Besides these we hear of many other churches that once
existed in the city, but have left no trace. We can only guess
that most of them were basilicas. Lists of names are given by
Butler, Dalton and Cabrol.⁴

However, there are remains of a few early churches in

(2) Ibid. p.10.
(3) Ibid. p.66; E. Amelineau: La Geographie de l'Egypte a l'Epoque
Copte, Paris, 1893, p.43.
O.M. Dalton: East Christian Art, Oxford, 1925, p.139; Cabrol:
Dictionnaire d'Archeologie Chretienne et de Liturgie, IV, col.
2294 f.
the Maryut district, to the west and south-west of Alexandria. The district was in direct contact with the Capital, and must have depended on its markets for the sale of its grapes, olives and other products. Moreover the history of the monuments shows how much they owed to the Patriarchs of Alexandria, so that they can truly be considered as examples of Alexandrian architecture. The largest and most important of these is the Shrine of St. Menas.

**St. Menas, Maryut**

The shrine lies at a distance of about forty miles from Alexandria, in the centre of the Maryut region. Though completely ruined now, it was at one time a world-famous place of pilgrimage, attracting thousands of visitors from every corner of the Christian world. The site was excavated and published by K. M. Kaufman (1906-7)

As might be expected from such an important martyr, countless legends have been attached to Menas. It seems, however, that he was martyred about the beginning of the fourth century, and buried in an earth-cut catacomb in Maryut. Then at some time before the middle of the century, the body was discovered, and was found to possess miraculous healing powers. It is possible that legends belonging to previous pagan gods, and there were many of these in the locality, were attached to Menas. However, from this time on, his fame continued to increase, and the spot gained more and more importance.

The original burial place of pagan origin, and does not differ

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from the Roman catacombs of Alexandria. Whether or not there was any monument above ground to mark the place, it is hard to say, but the first chapel built over the grave was a mud-brick oratory "like a tetraptylon," dating from the middle of the fourth century, of which nothing remains except the foundations of two small projecting apses on the eastern side. The description "tetrapylon" probably indicates a square-chamber-plan, with four arched recesses on its sides, a type that was not uncommon in tombs in Syria and Egypt. The side facing the entrance sometimes has a projecting apse, though again the two apses would have been an unusual feature. It is perhaps more likely that there was a third apse, and that the arrangement was a three-aisled basilica, similar to that built on the same site later on by Athanasius, but nothing can be said with certainty. The oratory was replaced by:

The Church Built by Athanasius.

It soon became necessary to build a bigger church, to give shelter to the increasing number of pilgrims. This was begun under Jovian (363-4), almost completed before the death of Valentinian I, in 375, and consecrated soon after that. At the same time, Athanasius converted part of the early catacomb into a crypt, which was largely destroyed later by Theophilus, when he rebuilt both the

(1) Ibid. p. 38.  (2) Ibid. p. 32, 40.
(3) Ibid. figs. 2, 3.
church and the crypt.¹

The remains of the Athanasian church are not enough to make a full reconstruction of the plan, but it seems to have been a T-shaped basilica, with three projecting eastern apses, transepts, and a three-aisled nave. Traces of the foundations of the central and northern apses have been found, but nothing of the southern. Foundation walls are also found in the nave, running east and west parallel with the main axis of the church; they probably carried the nave columns.²

The three projecting apses in the east present a unique feature in Egypt, for even when, later on, it became customary in both Coptic churches, to have three eastern chapels, each provided with its apse (Al-Mo'allakah is an example³), they were always confined within the wall, and never show on the outside. The earlier oratory, on the same site, had similar apses, so that it must have been the example followed by the architect of the Athanasian church. Outside Egypt no similar apses can be found in the Christian architecture of the early centuries in either Palestine or Rome.⁴ The nearest parallel seems to occur in the complex of St. Simeon Stylites, in Syria, dating from the sixth century. The plan there shows four large basilicas arranged in the form of a cross, with the base of the saint’s column at the centre, on axis with each of them. The eastern basilica has a central apse with a smaller one at each side, all protruding

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¹ Ward Perkins: op. cit., p.32.  
³ Infra: p.  
outside the wall. In St. Menas the apses are of the same diameter.

The transepts in this church are another feature which is not found in the churches of the hinter-land, though they frequently appear in early churches in the West, rarely in the East (Old St. Peter’s, St. John Lateran). They are here divided by transitional walls, running east to west, into five compartments: the central one was the sanctuary, the two flanking it probably contained the entrance to the crypt (which was an important part of the church), while the outer pair must have served some liturgical function, and probably correspond to the prothesis and diaconicon, though these were introduced only in the second half of the sixth century, to meet the requirements of a new processional hymn introduced into the liturgy at that time.  

This type of transept is similar to what is called "the tripartite transept," derived by Krautheimer from Greece, since the earliest examples of it (V century) come from there. We should bear in mind that at that time, church architecture was still in the experimental period, and that the liturgy had not yet been fixed. In fact, the succeeding church of Theophilus followed an almost completely different plan.

The Church of Theophilus (consecrated c.400-410)

Owing to the growing importance of the place, Theophilus

(1) E.G. Butler: Architecture and Other Arts, N.Y., 1903, p.185, fig.73.
SAINT MARY (MENAS), CHURCH OF THEOPHILUS

(after Ward Perkins: St. Menas)
(archbishop 385-412) undertook another reconstruction of the church, on a still bigger scale. Work was started in the time of Arcadius (395-408), and before Theophilus died, the building was in a state of completion to allow for its consecration, though probably the ornaments, marble panelling, and so on continued for years after that.

In plan, the church is an impressive T-shaped basilica with one eastern apse, a wide nave, two aisles and a western narthex. The apse is completely exposed outside (protruding apses began to appear in Syria about this time) and has radiating external buttresses, which are probably the earliest application of such a device in church architecture.

The transepts are not divided into compartments like those of the Athanasian church, nor are they a long narrow strip at right angles with the nave, like the transepts of later Western cathedrals, but they are a wide hall with three aisles and a terminal aisle at the north and south. Their purpose was undoubtedly to allow as many people as possible to be accommodated round the altar, situated in this case at the junction of the nave and transepts, so that they could watch the celebration of Mass easily. Terminal aisles are a regular feature in Egyptian churches, for the nave colonnade rarely ends abruptly on the west; there are either projecting pilasters in the western wall (the Crypt of Abu-Sargah), or more often, a returned aisle (Dair El-Abiad, Church at Dendereh, the Main Church at Saqqarah).

As said before, the altar stood at the crossing of the nave and transepts, nearer to the apse. It was covered with a

(1) Ward Perkins; op. cit., pp. 33, 47.
canopy, and surrounded with a rectangular chancel screen, from the western side of which ran a narrow passage probably leading to the ambon in the nave. Early churches in Palestine, till the end of the sixth century, had similar chancels, stretched down into the body of the church, raised one or two steps above the nave and surrounded on three sides with a solid low screen, which did not conceal the altar from the congregation. In Egypt, on the other hand, the celebration of Mass seems to have been always considered as one of the "Mysteries" of the church, to be watched only by the officiating clergy. Hence it was necessary to set apart a place for the altar, and to conceal it behind a solid high screen, or higab, stretching right across the eastern end of the church, from north to south.

Behind the altar, at the back of the chancel screen, was a raised dais with curved steps, presumably to seat the clergy, who would thus sit facing west and looking down upon the altar. This arrangement is most unusual: the dais, or tribune - as it is called - is normally found in the early churches in the curve of the eastern apse, and not separated from it by a passage. Examples of it are found both in Egypt (Al-Mo'allakah, Al-Adra Harat-Az-Zuailah), and elsewhere (Church at Parenzo).

Over the aisles of the nave and the transepts, were upper galleries for women (matronea), and the whole building must have had the usual Mediterranean wooden roof. To cover

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(1) Ward Perkins, op. cit., p. 48, Pl. XI.  
(2) See Crowfoot, op. cit., p. 47.  
(3) For the Sacraments of the Coptic Church, see A.J. Butler: The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt, Oxford, 1884, vol.II, Ch.VII, VIII.  
the area at the junction of the nave and transepts, must have been a considerable problem, for the corner columns are of the same diameter as the others, and no provision was made to carry any extra weight.¹

To the north of the church lay the domestic buildings, connected with the north aisle through a door, while on the south was the main entrance to the church: a triple doorway, flanked by columns. The orientation of the church is exactly east-west, but the usual western entrance was not possible for certain reasons, for the wall there contained a big door, with two smaller ones opening into the side aisles, leading to the narthex which connected the church with the nave of the old Athenian building (the narthex in fact occupied the eastern end of the older church, and was itself replaced by the sanctuary of the ninth-century one²).

To the west of the nave was the narthex, a rectangular hall leading to the older church and to the crypt which contained the saint's tomb. The central door in its eastern wall had a semicircular decorative niche on each side. These two niches in fact survived the ninth-century reconstruction, and became apsidal recesses, flanking the main apse of the later church.³ By an arrangement of columns, the northern and southern ends of the

¹ Ward Perkins, op. cit., p. 47. ² Ibid. p. 48. ³ It was probably these niches which misled Kaufmann in identifying the "Grave-church of Athanasius," which is in fact the ninth-century construction. See Ward Perkins, op. cit., p. 49.
narthex were turned into semi-circles covered with brick half-domes, resting on marble cornices. Such an arrangement, as we shall see later on, became common in Egyptian churches, and was followed in Dair El-Abiad, and Denderah.

Egypt seems to provide us with the earliest examples of the narthex. It was the place of discipline and admonition for penitents, as well as the place to which catechumens and others, who had not been baptised, withdrew during the service, and it may have been as a result of this, that in later Coptic churches, the narthex was often provided with a baptismal font, and used as the place for baptism.¹

At the same time as he rebuilt the church, Theophilus also rebuilt and enlarged the crypt. The older buildings still attracted the pilgrims, and had to be kept within easy access. A barrel-vaulted stair-case led down from the north-east side of the Athanasian church, down to the central tomb-chamber, on the site of the early tomb². To the west of the tomb-chamber was a small, square, domed chapel, with an ante-chamber at its northern end, while from the other side of the tomb-chamber a barrel-vaulted corridor led to the east, then turned north parallel with the entrance stair-case, and finally east again, up another flight of steps, into the north-west corner of the Theophilan church. The tomb-chamber, at the bottom of the stairs, consisted of two

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parts: the larger one, to the south, contained the actual tomb, while the northern part was smaller, and merely a corridor by which the pilgrims were led from the bottom of the stairs, through the antechamber, into the domed chapel, and eventually into the actual tomb. The tomb was covered with either a brick dome, like the chapel, or a spherical vault.¹

The chapel originally had a brick dome, supported on spherical triangular pendentives, resting on four irregular corner pilasters, which in turn carried the arches of four shallow recesses.² The southernmost of the recesses opened into a small annexe with a brick half-dome carried on squinches.³

The Baptistery:

It lies to the west of the area, on the same axis as the church, and must have been built by Theophilus. This is the only example of a baptistery in Egypt, and in fact, apart from Italy where separate baptisteries continued to be built perhaps by mere conservatism, their architecture in most regions came to an end early.⁴ In Egypt the font was normally situated in the building of the church itself.

The baptistery of St. Menas follows the usual plan for such buildings, namely the polygonal or circular room with domed roof, which was undoubtedly suggested by the architecture of Roman baths. It consists of a room, rectangular outside, but octagonal inside, the corners being occupied by enormous semi-

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¹ Ibid. p. 46.
² See Ward Perkins Pl. VI, 4.
³ Ibid. Pl. VI, 4. Kaufmann: Menasstadt, Pl. 9-6 & 8.
⁴ A. Grabar: Christian Architecture, East and West, Archaeology, II, No. 2 (June 1949), pp. 96 f.
circular recesses. The roof was a brick dome. In the centre, beneath a canopy, lies the circular basin, sunken in the ground, and approached by two flights of steps from the east and west sides.

To the west of this room is a shallow chamber terminating in apses at the shorter ends, with two niches in its eastern wall. Again to the south of the room, there is a large ante-chamber with a row of columns from east to west supporting the roof (see plan).

CONCLUSION.

The two early basilicas of St. Menas were built at a time when Alexandria was at the height of its greatness, and undoubtedly they had much in common with the constructions of Athanasius and Theophilus in the Capital itself. The church of Theophilus in particular, must have been the result of much experiment. Numerous features in them have been attributed to Greece, to Rome or to the East, but the resultant whole is a well-designed unit, of individual character, and the honour of its invention must be attributed to Alexandrian achievement.

Thus when Strzygowski describes it as an example of Hellenistic art,¹ the statement is hard to accept, and at any rate Hellenism in Egypt had a phase of its own that is probably more Egyptian than anything else.² Neither the Ptolemies nor the Romans, managed to change the character of the native art,

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¹ Strzygowski: Origin, p. 58.
or to introduce their own into the country.

Again when Monneret de Villard describes it as belonging to a class of architecture that is foreign to Egypt, he is merely evading the main issue, unless by "Egypt" we mean the hinter-land, as opposed to Alexandria, for indeed the plan of St. Menas is unique in the country. The "foreign" elements in St. Menas can be explained as the result of an interchange of ideas between countries which had adopted the same religion, and were trying to develop a place of worship well suited to its requirements.

The other point of importance is the use, in the substructures, of the vault, the dome, the spherical triangular pendentive and the squinch, all regarded as progressive devices in architecture. These will be discussed in a later chapter; it will suffice here to say that they are constructed in typical native manner that suggests a long life of local tradition in their use. Yet they do not appear in the upper structures. Surely the reason must be that, though well known, they were preserved for minor uses.

The stormy history of Christianity in Egypt, and the continuous destruction of religious buildings both before and after the Arab conquest, makes it extremely uncertain whether the churches preserved the old types, or whether, during reconstruction, they were basically altered, or even built on an altogether new plan. Indeed traditions connect many buildings with sacred personages, and church benefactors, especially Empress Helena, and Constantine (Abu Sarga, Dair El-Bakara, Dair El-Shouhada etc.\(^1\)), but it is unlikely that existing remains contain much of the original structure. In Cairo itself the churches have suffered most, the present ones are mainly the result of numerous restorations at different periods\(^2\).

At any rate, we can divide the early churches, scattered all over the country, into the following types:

1. The Hal-\(c\)hurch: an ordinary square or rectangular chamber, divided by screens into the usual compartments: the haikal, choir, men's division and women's division. An example is found in the Little Church of Al-Mo'allakah, in Old Cairo, thought by Butler to be the original church of Al-Mo'allakah, and to belong to the third or fourth century\(^3\). The northern-most

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\(^1\) See A. Badawy: Les premières \(c\)glises d'\(\text{\'e}gypte\) jusqu'au siècle de Saint Cyrille, Cairo, 1947, pp.3-4.

\(^2\) A. Patricolo and U. Monneret de Villard: The Church of Sitt Barbara in Old Cairo, Florence, 1922, pp.22-3.

\(^3\) Butler: Coptic Churches, vol.1, pp.228 f.
THE DOMED CHURCH NEAR ADDENDAN

(after Somers Clarke: Christian Antiquities)
chapel in it, adjoining the big church, is complete in itself, and contains all the above-mentioned divisions, separated from each other by wooden screens. The plan is of course very simple, and of no architectural pretentions. Moreover it is capable of expansion only to a very limited extent. It is covered with a barrel vault, which may or may not be original. It seems to have been the custom in the East, from a very early time, for women to sit behind men.

2. The Domed Church: Some of the Nubian churches are characterized by a central dome, like the church near Addendan, called by Somers Clarke 'Dair Ash El-Fadelah'. The nave has a dome, small in size, supported on four heavy piers, with a vaulted aisle on each side. Beyond the aisles there is a long vaulted chamber on each side, communicating with the church by a door at the western end of the wall (see plan). The date is not certain, but the church probably belongs to early days of christianity in Nubia, and seems to have been influenced by Byzantine architecture. Christianity was introduced into Nubia in the middle of the sixth century, by a mission sent from Constantinople, and for nearly a century after that, the Nubian church remained subject to Constantinople. This undoubtedly left its mark on architecture.

Another variety of domed churches appeared in Egypt after the Arab conquest. These are composed of square rooms, or units, grouped together, and all covered with domes. The plan has many advantages: it can be expanded in any direction without increasing

(3) Mileham, op.cit., pp. 2f.
the span of each unit to be covered, and it satisfied the needs of later Coptic ritual in having more than one haikal at the east end. We have examples in the two churches in Harat Ar-Rum, Cairo, dedicated to Mari Girgis and Al-Adra.\(^1\) They are covered with twelve domes each, three over the eastern sanctuaries, and the rest over the nine squares into which the body of the church is divided. In Al-Adra they are carried on six piers, two of them within the haikal screen, and in Mari Girgis on pillars, and in both cases they are connected with arches. Similar churches occur in the south: at Edfu, Medinet Habu and other places\(^2\). The existing buildings certainly date from after the seventh century, and whether the plan had been developed before then, or not, is impossible to say. One of the results of the Arab conquest is that it stopped the supply of imported wood, which had been the main material for roofing churches, and so the ground plans were modified to suit local materials,\(^3\) and architects had to avoid the very wide spans.

3. The Cruciform Church: To this category, Butler assigned the Church of St. Barbara, in Old Cairo, originally founded in the fifth century, though it underwent a complete reconstruction in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with alterations at later periods. The transepts mentioned by Butler do not belong to the original plan, and Patricolo and Monneret de Villard, who had a chance of examining the building carefully, while it was being repaired, some thirty-five years ago, came to the conclusion that, originally, the church was an ordinary three-aisled basilica,

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\(^1\) Butler: Coptic Churches, vol.1, pp.278-83.
\(^2\) Somers Clarke, Christian Antiquities of the Nile Valley, Pls.XXXIII, XXXIV.
\(^3\) See Baedeker's Egypt and the Sudan, Leipzig, 1929, p. CLXXXIX.
with no transepts

But in Nubia, several churches, again of uncertain date, belong to the cross-in-square type. These are the churches at Gandal Irki, Madeaq and other places. They have a central dome, the haikal occupies the eastern arm of the cross, and the two eastern corners are occupied by side-chambers. The western corners are also occupied by chambers, so that, outside, the church retains its rectangular appearance.

4. Churches with transverse nave: Instead of the long nave, some churches in the Natrunt Valley have a shallow, transverse nave, of the same length as the eastern sanctuaries, or slightly longer. They occur at Dair Es-Suriani, in the Church of Es-Sitt Mariam, and Dair Abu Makar, the Churches of Abu Iskhirun and Esh-Shiukh. The type is well-suited to the small monastic congregation. White, who calls it the short type, attributes it to a Syrian origin, and indeed it is very similar to the Church of St. Jacob, at Salah, considered by Strzygowski to be a typical Syrian church of the early period. The monastic churches of Egypt are all of a late date, those in the Natrunt Valley are later than the ninth century, and it is impossible to say whether or not they reflect an earlier tradition in church planning.

5. The Basilica: The types dealt with so far are rare, and mostly of uncertain date, but with the basilica, we come to the largest and most important group of churches. Many are well-documented and securely dated to the early centuries. They can be

(2) Somers Clarke: Christian Antiquities of the Nile Valley PIs.VII, XX.
(4) Ibid. p.13; Strzygowski: Origin, p.68, Figs. 6, 7.
subdivided into:

Churches with trefoil eastern end.
Churches with one apse.
Churches with three apses.
Five-aisled churches.
Domed basilicas.
Crypts.
Nubian churches.

The Trefoil-ended Basilica.

The sanctuary in these churches has three apses arranged round a rectangular room and opening into it on the north, east and south. There are three early churches in Egypt of this kind, the White Monasteries, near Sohag, and the basilica near Dendereh. St. Simeon, Aswan, is also affiliated to this group, but as it is later in date, and since it departed from the regular flat roof and has, instead, a domed one, it will be treated separately, as a 'domed basilica'.

DAIR ANNA SHENOUDI, or DAIR EL-ABRIAD (THE WHITE MONASTERY).

Built by the Great Shenoudi of Akhmim, and called the White Monastery from the white lime-stone of which the external walls are built. The present Dair is in fact only the church of the monastery. The keep, wall of enclosure, gardens and other monastic buildings 1 spoken of by Abu Salih, who wrote at the end of the XII or the beginning of the XIII century, are all gone. The church was built

(1) Abu Salih Al-Armani: The churches and Monasteries of Egypt, ed. and tr. Evetts and Butler, Oxford, 1895, f.32.
in the life-time of Shenoudi (died in 452/3), probably in 440. It was the second church, the first one had been built in the days of Constantine, and was surrounded by a large number of coenobites. After a set-back in the reign of Julian, a period of great expansion came in the days of Shenoudi. The number of monks increased rapidly, and it became necessary to build a bigger church, as well as the monastic dwellings. The work was entrusted to Besa, or Visa, Shenoudi's pupil and successor. A new site was chosen, outside the existing town, the old church was pulled down, and parts of it were re-used in the new building, some of the stone carvings being confused in the process.

Outside, the Dair has the appearance of an ancient Egyptian temple. The walls batter considerably as they rise (but they are vertical inside), and at the top, there is the typical gorge-cornice which differs from the ancient Egyptian only in the absence of the torus-moulding at its base. The stones used, sometimes of considerable size, are laid in horizontal courses in hard mortar, with their major axis parallel with the direction of the wall. Thus they have the weakness of ancient Egyptian masonry, namely the absence of proper bond. The whole surface seems to have been covered with a coat of plaster, following the ancient custom, with false joints marked in red. High in the walls there are two ranges of window-like recesses, some of which are real windows, while others are blind, and do not show inside. The walls are pierced through with three

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door-ways: one on the south, opening into the large hall, one on the west, opening into the narthex (though not exactly on the central axis of the church), and the third on the north, opening directly into the aisle. There is also a small door in the north wall opening at the foot of a stair which rises in the north-east angle of the building, a similar one at the eastern end of the southern hall, and a third one in the west wall opening at the foot of the stairs to the south of the narthex.

By the beginning of this century, the great church had shrunk in size, it became confined to the eastern end, while the western half of the nave had been occupied by houses, but the original plan can easily be traced.

The Narthex: The western end is occupied by the narthex, and a stair-case to the south of it. The narthex is a narrow rectangular hall with a door in each of its longer sides, the western was, presumably, the main entrance to the church, and the other led into the nave. In a church of this size we would expect to find more than one western entrance, though to the worshipper entering through this single door, and faced with the long nave colonnade directing his eyes towards the sanctuary, the effect must have been great. The northern end of the narthex has an arrangement of five columns forming a semi-circle, carrying an architrave on which rests an apse, an arrangement very similar to the Theophilian church of St. Menas, Maryut. The southern end contains a niche flanked by

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(1) For a description of these doors, see Peers, op. cit., p.138; Somers Clarke, op. cit., p.151, Monneret de Villard, op. cit., p.122.

(2) See Somers Clarke, op. cit., pp.155 f.

(3) Somers Clarke, op. cit., fig.34, p.157.
two doors leading to the stair-case, and there seems to have been four columns in this part, only one of which remains beside the western entrance. The walls are decorated with semi-circular and rectangular niches. Originally the narthex had a wooden ceiling forming the floor of the gallery above, but at a later date it was replaced by a vault.

The stair to the south of the narthex leads to the women's gallery. That was the normal place for stairs in Egyptian and Nubian churches, though at Dendereh and Dair Abu Hennis it is on the north side.

The Nave: The nave was separated from the north and south aisles by lofty colonnades returned at the west side. There were originally nineteen columns on the longer sides, with four more between the westernmost ones. The remaining columns are of a mixed type, with unequal intercolumniations, some of the capitals do not fit their columns, and those on the north side are not exactly opposite those on the south. It seems that when the wooden roof had perished, by fire or because of some other misfortune, the granite shafts that were still available were re-erected, though sometimes it was necessary to supplement the height. Piers of red brick were set up to complete the number, for it seems that, though the church had shrunk, parts of the nave were still used. This reconstruction probably took place at the same time as the alterations at the east end of the church, and the building of the present

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(2) Ibid., p.116.
(3) Mileham, op. cit., p.12.
(4) Infra, p.
western wall, which have been dated by Crum, according to an inscription, to the early thirteenth century.

The columns carried an architrave, on which rested the floor of the upper galleries over the aisles and the narthex. The height of the galleries is indicated by sockets in the walls undoubtedly to receive beams of wood, another row of sockets higher up indicates the position of their roof. It is rather difficult to see the object of such galleries in a monastic church, where, of course, accommodation for women was not required, unless by that time galleries had become an established feature of Christian architecture. Galleries were usual in Byzantine churches (S. Sophia), in Nubia (Addendan, Serre), and in Palestine (The Martyrium in the Holy Sepulchre), but they are not found in the monasteries of the Natrix Valley. We also know that Pachomius arranged nunneries as well as monasteries (see Chapter I p.35), and undoubtedly the fame of Shenoudi attracted pilgrims and suppliants of both sexes. Texts from the Monastery of Epiphanius, in the same region, often refer to women, and it may have been found necessary to arrange for them to attend service in the church. It was not only the nunneries which possessed no churches, but some of the monasteries as well; no church was found in the Monastery of Epiphanius, and we must suppose that the monks (also the hermits living outside) went to the churches of nearby coenobia, or towns.

(2) Peers, op.cit. p.145; Somers Clarke, op. cit., p.156; Monneret de Villard, op. cit., p.96.
In the middle of the nave, at some distance from the east end, there is a block of granite carved into five steps, covered with a canopy of brick, which must have been the ambon. The arrangement of the floor-slabs seems to indicate a narrow passage leading from the sanctuary to the ambon, similar to the church of St. Menas.

Between the nave and the sanctuary, both Peers and Somers Clarke have suggested the existence of a transept, the central part of which would have occupied the area of the present church, but Monneret de Villard, judging on structural grounds, dismisses the idea. Transepts, whether projecting beyond the side walls of the church or confined within them, were common in western architecture, rare in the East— the only example so far known in Egypt is at St. Menas. They always have their roof at right angles with that of the nave. At the White Monastery the roof has disappeared, and the eastern end of the nave has undergone many alterations so that it is difficult to make a full restoration of it. The problem will be discussed again when dealing with the Red Monastery, which is better preserved.

Of the two ranges of windows seen outside in the northern wall, the upper one opened into the gallery, the lower into the aisle. In the south wall, the upper recesses are blind windows, the lower opened into the hall bordering the church on that side, and since there were openings in the wall separating it from the aisle, a certain amount of light would have got through. Monneret de Villard again rejects the idea of a clerestory, giving direct light to the nave, and compares this case with the early churches of Old Cairo,

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(2) Monneret de Villard, op. cit., pp.98 f.
St. Barbara, St. Sergius etc., but the analogy is not complete. None of the latter churches had the size of Dair El-Ebiad, so that lighting would not have been a big problem, and we must remember that the clerestory was used in the ancient temples from at least as early as the New Kingdom; the builders of the Dair may have adopted it from there.

The original roof was undoubtedly of wood, and historical references mention its gable shape, but it has disappeared without leaving a trace.

The Sanctuary: The eastern end has undergone many alterations, but can be restored by comparison with the Red Monastery, the sanctuary of which is in a better state of preservation. When the original wooden roof was replaced by domes, probably in the thirteenth century, stronger ground support was required to take the increased weight. The two columns which carried the sanctuary arch, in the original plan, became buried on two sides by the brick piers supporting the dome of the sanctuary and that of the present nave. To the east of this arch was a rectangular space into which opened, on the north, east and south, semi-circular apses slightly stilted. The lateral apses were separated from the square space by a passage, now closed by doors. This passage connected the aisles directly with the rooms at the east of the church. Each apse was decorated with six detached columns in two ranges, carrying richly carved architraves. Between the columns were niches alternately semi-circular and rectangular, with semi-domed heads richly ornamented. The architraves did not rest directly on the capitals of

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(1) Monneret de Villard, op. cit., pp.98.
(6) Somers Clarke, op. cit., p.152; Peers, op. cit., p.142.
the columns, but on wooden lintels. On the decay of these lintels, they were replaced with brick walls with arched openings corresponding with the niches¹.

The original position of the altar is disputable. At present it lies on the chord of the eastern apse, flanked by two cubical blocks, the nature of which cannot be decided². The lateral apses do not seem to have had altars, nor is there room for them (though the northern apse has a slab of marble, turned as much as possible to the east, that resembles an altar³). The altar and the central apse, with their floor raised a step, are enclosed by a wooden screen, or higab, pierced with a door in the middle, of modern date. It is not possible to say whether it replaced an older one or not⁴.

There are two possible theories as to the original arrangement of this part of the church. The first altar may have stood in the centre of the sanctuary⁵, thus there would be more room for the officiating priest to move freely round the altar, which is certainly difficult now with the two blocks on both sides. This is perhaps the more likely position, but if, on the other hand, the first altar stood in the same position as its successor, with the higab to the west of it, then the rest of the sanctuary probably served as a choir, and the arrangement, in a way, similar to some of the ninth century churches in the Natrun Valley (e.g. El Adra, Dair Es-Suriani⁶).

The passages, mentioned before, separating the lateral apses from the central square, lead to various rooms flanking the main apse.

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² Somers Clarke (op. cit., pp.153-4) & Peers (op. cit., p.148) suggest that they are minor altars, but it is difficult to see why they should be in such a position, or what purpose they served.  
⁴ Somers Clarke, op.cit. p.154.  
That to the north, thought to be the library\(^1\), leads to the stair-case occupying the north east angle of the building. It has underneath it a small dark crypt, not really buried underground, though it has no windows. The southern room contains the baptismal font in a niche in the eastern wall\(^2\). It leads to a small circular domed room that can also be approached directly from the south transept, through a room with two columns about its middle, supporting the roof.

The Southern Hall: This is a long, rather narrow hall, occupying the southern side of the church. The wall between it and the aisle contained several windows. The opposite wall had two doors, one at its eastern end and the other further west (the latter door opens into a passage which forms the present entrance of the church). The western wall of the hall has an apse decorated with six columns\(^3\), the eastern contains a door leading into a rectangular room.

The function of this hall is not easy to recognize. It may have been a lateral narthex, a feature that was not uncommon in early Syrian churches\(^4\), and it appears in Egypt itself later on, in the main church of the Monastery of St. Jeremias, Saqqara\(^5\). Or, and this is perhaps more likely, it may have been a refectory for the monks. It seems that as early as the fourth century, a common meal for the monks was considered of religious importance, and thus a refectory, and perhaps a kitchen as well, were attached to the church.\(^6\) Refectories of a later date appear in some of the churches of the Natrun Valley\(^7\).

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(1) W. E. Grum, Jour. of Theological Studies, 1904, pp. 553 f.
(4) Ibid., p. 112.
(5) J. E. Quibell: Excavations at Saqqara, III, 1907-8, Cairo 1909, p. 5.
(7) Ibid.
DAIR ANBA BISHOI, or DAIR EL-AHMAR (THE RED MONASTERY).

The history of this monastery is almost completely unknown. It is strange that Abu Salih makes no mention of it, though he has much to say about the White Monastery near by. It is dedicated to Bishoi, pupil of Shenoudi. Unlike the White Monastery, the outer wall is built of red brick, hence the name, but otherwise, the outside appearance, the plan and general details are almost identical, so that they cannot be too far apart in date and are probably the work of the same architect. There are a few points of difference.

Materials from older temples are frequently met with in the White Monastery, but in the Red Monastery they are all uniform, there is no mixing of different elements, which probably suggests that the latter is slightly later in date.

The Red Monastery is built on smaller dimensions, and less of it is left, but the parts that remain are in better preservation, and it is in fact by them that we can get the complete plan of the trefoil sanctuary. Unlike the White Monastery, all three apses here open directly into the central square, and the passage connecting the nave with the rooms grouped round the east end, goes through the lateral aisles. Thus while the eastern apse has three decorative niches in it, there is room for only two in the others. The original wooden roof was, also, replaced by a dome, at a later period.

There is no trace of the narthex. The nave colonnades had eleven columns each, of double order, with two more for the western returned aisle, and another two of bigger dimensions between the

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(2) Freshfield, op. cit., p.46; Monneret de Villard, op.cit., p.125.
(4) Ibid., pp.94-5; Somers Clarke, op.cit., pp.168-9.
easternmost columns, corresponding to the pilasters which flank the columns of the triumphal arch (See Monneret de Villard's figs. 123, 126 and section 114). These two extra columns are not easy to account for, especially as they would rather obstruct the view of the altar. They may have been merely intended to complete the symmetry of the plan, as in the church near Dendereh¹ (to be discussed later on). They were not a common feature in early church architecture, and in the White Monastery itself they have disappeared.

In some of the Nubian churches the central haikal, and consequently the triumphal arch, projects into the nave (e.g., at Addendan). Such an arrangement is not unlike that of the Red Monastery, where the eastern end of the nave may have been cut off, and added to the sanctuary for some liturgical purpose². The suggestion is strengthened by the fact that the centre of this area is at a higher level than the nave³. If we accept the idea that the altar was situated in the centre of the sanctuary (supra p. 65), then the eastern part of the nave may have served as the choir.

A third, and simpler, explanation is that the two columns were merely intended to reduce the span of the nave, and so make the roofing easier, though admittedly the suggestion would have more attraction if we accept Somer Clarke's idea of the existence of a transept.

THE BASILICA NEAR DENDEREH.

This is the third example of the trefoil plan. It is smaller in size, but the masonry is of good quality. Nothing is

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¹ Monneret de Villard, op. cit., pp.100-1.
² Ibid., pp.101-3.
³ Ibid., p.103.
known of its history, though it probably dates from the end of the fifth century\(^1\).

A plan is given by Somers Clarke (Pl.XLI), and a restored one by Monneret de Villard (vol.I, fig. 52)\(^2\). The church has two doors situated at the western ends of the longer walls, as is common in Nubian churches (Addendan, Serre). They open into vestibules, leading to the narthex which occupies the full width of the church. The narthex ends on the north and south sides in apses. Opening into it, on the west, are three rooms, one of which is a stair-case. Its eastern wall is decorated with circular niches, others appear in the vestibules facing the doors, and similar ones are found in the nave as well.

Three doors lead from the narthex to the church: a wide nave separated from the aisles by six columns on each side, with two more for the western returned aisle, and another two opposite them on the east, similar to the Red Monastery.

The sanctuary has the three apses opening into the central square. The main apse is decorated with six circular niches, but none appear in the others. The lateral apses have doors connecting them with the nave, and they seem also to have contained doors in their centre, connecting them with the chambers at the eastern end.

Somers Clarke compares the carved detail in this church to that of the White and Red Monasteries\(^3\), and their plans are unmistakably similar. Together they represent the oldest, and perhaps the most important group of churches in Egypt\(^4\).

\(^2\) A small restored plan also appears in Baedeker's Egypt and the Sudan, facing p.262, but it makes it a five-aisled church.
\(^3\) Christian Antiquities, p.140.
\(^4\) The origin of the trefoil is discussed in a later chapter (infra, p.119).
The Single-apsed Basilica

In these churches the nave only ends eastward in an apse and the side aisles end in narrow rectangular chambers. The apse is always internal, there are no cases in Egypt of apses projecting beyond the wall of the sanctuary. The plan is very similar to that of several churches in Northern Syria from the fourth century onwards, e.g. the Church at Khirbet Hass and the Basilica at Ruweha (both 4th century), and Dar Kita, Kasr-il-Banat and Btirs (5th century). In Egypt there are three early examples of this type: Dair Abu Hennis, the Main Church and the Tomb Church in the Monastery of St. Jeremias, Saqqara. To these we might add the Church of St. Barbara, Old Cairo, and a few others of uncertain date, like the Small Church on the Island of Philae, near Aswan, and Dair-is-Salib at Nakada.

DAIR ABU HENNIS

The Dair lies on the east bank of the Nile, to the south of the ancient city of Antinoe, and is assigned by Butler to an early date, for he considers that its deep apse, ornamented with recesses flanked by pilasters, belongs to a type that was common in the time of Constantine, but a fifth century date seems more likely.

The plan is a small basilica of simple form. The western end is occupied by the narthex, with a stair-case to the north of it, probably leading to the upper galleries. The narthex is a fairly wide rectangular hall, with the only entrance to the church in the centre of the facade, opposite which lies the entrance to the nave. Both doors are flanked with pilasters. The eastern wall of the narthex, to the south of the doorway, contains a shallow circular recess, similar

(1) H.C. Butler: Architecture & Other Arts, N.Y., 1903, pp.93, 99, 137, 140, 152.
to that in the White Monastery, and there is a bigger niche in the southern wall nearer to the east (see plan).

The nave is separated from the aisles by four columns on each side, but there is no western returned aisle. The aisles are narrow, probably of two floors, though there is no trace of the upper gallery now. Each of the lateral walls is decorated with three square niches, one between every two columns, which are flanked by corinthian pilasters and covered with an arch.

The apse occupies the full width of the haikal, separated from the nave by an arch of triumph supported on L-shaped pilasters. Small doors in its sides open into narrow side chambers: the southern one contains the font. These chambers are also connected with the aisles. The apse is decorated with a circular niche, flanked by two square ones. Ornamental niches are characteristic of Egyptian churches of all periods.

The church was originally covered with wood, which was destroyed by decay or violence and replaced, at some time after the Arab conquest, by three domes over the nave, and one over the haikal. The ground-floor had to be modified, and heavy piers were erected to support the domes. At the same time the church was enlarged and additions were made on the north side.

THE MONASTERY OF ST. JEREMIAS, SAQQARA

The Monastery was excavated by Quibell, and published by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities, in a series of reports, early this century.

(1) Ibid., p.186.
(2) Ibid., p.183, Pl.IV.
(3) J. E. Quibell: Excavations at Saqqara, 1907-8 (Cairo, 1909); 1908-9, 1909-10 (Cairo, 1912).
St. Jeremias is mentioned by John of Nikiou, who wrote c.A.D. 630, as a contemporary of Anastasius (491-518), so he must have flourished in the second half of the fifth century, and the monastery was probably founded c.470\(^1\), though it is possible that a monastery had already existed before the time of Jeremias, and that he received the honour of the founder because of his great services to the community or his remarkable character\(^2\). The coins found during the excavations begin with Anastasius, and the oldest remains probably date from that time\(^3\). The monastery contains two early churches: The Tomb Church, and the Main Church.

The Tomb Church: Except for the eastern end, this edifice does not seem to have undergone heavy reconstruction like the Main Church, for the materials are all uniform, the capitals of columns are identical and the sculpture is of the same style. It was probably the first church of the monastery built at the end of the fifth century, and when a bigger church was erected, it was altered at the east and used as a burial-place for the founder and some other outstanding figures\(^4\).

The building is almost subterranean, but there is no trace of the stair leading down to it. There is a room in the south east corner, and another one at the south west which might have contained the stair-case\(^5\).

The plan is basilical, with a nave separated from each aisle by a row of four columns, and an extra column for the returned aisle. The eastern chambers were walled off, as said before, and the L-shaped pillars which must have supported the arch of triumph were joined with

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(1) Saqqara, 1907-8, Introduction, pp.I-III.
(2) Ibid., p.III.
(3) Ibid., loc. cit.
(4) Saqqara, 1908-9, 1909-10, p.V.
(5) Ibid., p.10.
a red-brick wall, covered with thick plaster\textsuperscript{1}. The site of the altar was used as a tomb for someone of great importance, probably Jeremias himself, and the internal walls were covered with marble, as well as the floor, but there is no sign in the walls of any door at all\textsuperscript{2}. The chamber to the north of the sanctuary was similarly treated, and other cells are found along the sides of the aisles. The eastern wall of the church has been destroyed, so it is impossible to say anything about the apse, if there was one.

The Main Church: founded in the early sixth century\textsuperscript{3}, with good under-structures, and marble columns inside. In the second half of the seventh century, the monastery was sacked during persecution\textsuperscript{4}, and the church was completely destroyed. Soon afterwards a new church was built, on the same model, but the floor was raised, and it was shortened on the east side. This church stood for half a century or so, but again about the middle of the eighth century it was badly damaged. The existing remains are those of the second church: a basilica, with a nave of very wide span (over 35 feet from centre to centre of the columns), two narrow aisles (c.5 feet), and a western returned aisle\textsuperscript{5}. Starting on the west, there is a narthex, divided into three parts by a wall of brick, evidently of later date, though it might have replaced an earlier one, and another wall of stone of which the foundations only remain\textsuperscript{6}.

The narthex leads to the nave through a wide door of three bays, separated by columns: the width and position of the door is shown by its granite threshold. The church has two other doors, one on the south opening into the covered colonnade, or mandara, on that

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid., p.10-11. \textsuperscript{2} Ibid., p.10. \textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p.V. \textsuperscript{4} Ibid., p.VI. \textsuperscript{5} Ibid., p.5. \textsuperscript{6} Saqqara, 1907-8, p.3.
side, and the other on the north leading to the monastic buildings (see Saqqara, t.IV, Pl.I).

The columns on the north side of the nave are fairly regularly spaced, but on the south, the intercolumniations are narrower, and there are at least two extra columns. This irregularity has already been noticed in the White Monastery (ṣaʿfa ra, p.61). The columns are mainly of limestone, except for three which are of marble, undoubtedly left from the first church, and the two pillars of the western door, which, like the threshold, are of granite. A hole in the pavement of the nave, on the main axis, probably indicates the position of the epiphany tank.

The roof has completely vanished, and no trace of it remains, but considering the span of the nave, it must have been a wooden one. At the eastern end of the nave there is a low bench of alabaster blocks, mised a step above the floor, and stretched right across the church. Against this the higab must have been fixed; a screen of carved and painted wood, several fragments of which were found nearby (see Saqqara, t.III, Pl.XXXIX, XL). Beyond it is the haikal, its floor being lower than the nave, a most unusual feature. The haikal has its apse, which does not occupy, like Dair Abu Hennis, the full width of the wall, and there are the usual side chambers.

The foundations of the apse are of poor, rough mud-brick, but beyond it on the east Quibel discovered the foundations of another apse, at a lower level. These are built of solid stone, and must belong to the first church.

The history of the building thus becomes a bit clearer. The

(1) Ibid., p.2.  (2) Ibid. p.4; Saqqara, 1908-9, 1909-1
(3) Saqqara, 1907-8, p.5.  (4) Ibid., loc. cit.
early sixth century church was well-built, with stone foundations, and columns of marble, probably imported, but most of the capitals were of limestone, made locally. It had finely carved friezes, inside and out, and a wooden roof, and the eastern apse had a semi-dome, covered with mosaics, remains of which were found among the ruins. The second church was built at a higher level, with poorer materials. Whatever remains were saved from the ruins, were re-used in the new building, with some new lime-stone pillars, and materials from ancient temples. It was obviously built at a period of poverty.

The Mandara: This is an L-shaped, covered court adjoining the south side of the building, a position similar to the Refectory of the White Monastery, but there is no more similarity between the two. Its floor is on the same level as the church, and underneath it there is another pavement parallel with the floor of the earlier church. Thus it seems certain that the second church followed closely the plan of its predecessor. The mandara is approached on the east by a double stairway, of which the narrow one, on the right, may have led directly to the women's galleries, above the aisles; no trace of a stair-case has been found in the church itself, but again there is no sign of the upper stair that would be needed. The function of this mandara is not clear, perhaps it was used as a meeting place for the monks, or as a guest room.

THE CHURCH OF ST. BARBARA IN THE ROMAN FORTRESS, OLD CAIRO

This is a late member of the group, the present building of the church being assigned by Patricolo to the eleventh century, with

(3) Saqqara, 1908-9, 1909-10, p.IV. (2) Saqqara, 1907-8, p.5.
(3) Saqqara, 1908-9, 1909-10, p.V, VI.
still later modifications\(^1\). It is possible, however, that it preserves
the plan of the first church, built in the fourth or fifth century, and
in fact most of the churches in Old Cairo seem to have a plan older
than the buildings actually are.

Before the restoration that was being carried on at the time
of Butler's visit in 1880 and again in 1884, the church was a regular
basilica, with a central haikal and two rectangular side chapels. The
apse is not circular, but seven-sided, with the two sides towards the
nave longer than the others. There was a narthex and galleries for
women, but the transepts, mentioned by Butler, seem to be a modification
of the original plan.\(^2\)

The Small Church on the Island of Philae\(^3\), and the Southern Church at
Dair-is-Salib, Nakada\(^4\), are both of uncertain date. The first has a
semi-circular apse in the haikal, connected with a narrow chamber on
the north, which does not occupy the full width of the aisle since the
outer (northern) wall is pushed in. The room to the south of the haikal
is occupied by a stair, in a most unusual place.

The second is the most important of the three churches at
Dair-is-Salib. Originally, it was a crude brick basilica, then at a
later date it was modified and heavy piers constructed to provide
enough support for a brick-domed roof. The central haikal is separated
from the nave by a wide triumphal arch. The side chapels are square
in shape and have their altars, but there is no connection between the
central haikal and the lateral ones.

\(^1\) A. Patricolo & U. Monneret de Villard: The Church of Sitt Barbara,
\(^2\) Patricolo & Monneret de Villard, op. cit., pp.31 f.
\(^3\) Somers Clarke: Christian Antiquities, Pl.XXIV, fig.1.
\(^4\) Ibid., Pl.XXXVIII, 1, pp.126 f.
Plate V

Domestic Buildings

Second North Aisle

North Aisle

South Aisle

Open Court

Narthex

Pulpit

Sanctuary

Roman Bastion

Little Church Al Muallaqah

Church Al Muallaqah within the Roman Fortress of Babylon

Roman Work III

Coptic Work III

(after Butler: Coptic Churches)
The Three-apsed Basilica

This type results when the side-chapels, as well as the main haikal, are provided with eastern apses. The examples in Egypt are comparatively late, for apart from Al-Mo'allakah, the buildings are later than the Arab conquest. Usually the central apse is bigger than the lateral ones (Mari Mina, between Cairo and Old Cairo). There are no projecting apses like those of St. Simeon in Syria (VI century). In most cases the three apses are provided with their altars, so that they are all full haikals. There is no indication as to when such a practice was first introduced, perhaps soon after the Arab conquest; in any case it became typical of Coptic Churches of the later period.

THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF AL-MO'ALLAKAH, IN THE ROMAN FORTRESS OF BABYLON

It is dedicated to the Virgin, and called Al-Mo'allakah, or the hanging church from the fact that it is suspended between two bastions of the Fortress. The church was probably founded about the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth, judging by the remains of the original wood-work, but the present church is dated by Butler, with various alterations, to the sixth century.

The entrance to the church is on the west side through the narthex, now used as a mandara or guest-hall, and fitted with long sitting benches along the eastern, northern and southern walls. The narthex is of the open type, the western wall being replaced with a row of columns supporting the upper storey. It does not occupy the full width of the church, for the northern and southern ends are taken by the stairs leading up to the gallery. The stair-cases open into

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(2) Butler, op. cit., p. 27. See also J. M. Middleton, On the Coptic Churches of Old Cairo, Archaeologia, XLVIII (II), 1885, pp. 397 f.
the narthex, but only the southern communicates with the nave.

This is the only example of an open western narthex in Egypt (cf. St. Menas, the White Monastery and Denderah), and to the west of it there is an open court, similar to the atrium of western churches. The atrium is not common in eastern churches, and it therefore seems likely that in Al-Mo'Allakah, it represents a Roman influence in the country. This is the more reasonable as the church is situated in one of the principal Roman camps in Egypt. Unfortunately, this part was severely restored at the end of the last century, so that it is not safe to emphasize any conclusions drawn from its present arrangement.

Two doors lead from the narthex to the main body of the church; one opening into the nave, and the other into the north aisle (see plan). The western end of the church is cut off by a wooden screen, supporting the upper gallery over the narthex, which projects eastward. There are no upper galleries over the aisles.

There are several irregularities about the plan, probably due to the unnatural foundations of the church. The nave has two aisles on the north and one on the south, all differing in width. The southern colonnade consists of a row of eight columns, carrying a wooden architrave, lightened by small relieving arches. A similar colonnade separates the two northern aisles, but between the nave and the flanking northern aisle there are only three widely-spaced columns joined by arches. The pulpit is situated beside the eastern one of these, in the nave. The northern-most aisle is the narrowest of them all, and it still narrows further towards the east, that being undoubtedly necessitated by the foundations, and it does not end in a sanctuary.

(1) Swift: Roman Sources of Christian Art, p.11.
(2) Butler, op. cit., p.209. (3) Ibid., p.216.
A large epiphany tank is situated in the northern aisle, a rather strange position. The nave contains a smaller tank, the pulpit, and the patriarch's chair beside the western screen.

The church has three haikals, all ending in internal shallow apses. The central apse occupies the full width of the haikal, and contains a tribune of four curved steps approached at the bottom by three straight ones. The other two apses are less in diameter, and also have their tribunes. This is the first time we meet with the tribune in Egypt. The roof consists of vaults carried on over the sanctuaries.

The Five-aisled Basilica

The double aisle is the normal method to increase the capacity of the important churches, in order to accommodate a big congregation, without at the same time increasing the difficulty of roofing a wide span. The disadvantage of this method is that it is not easy to arrange the columns in such a way that the point of focus, the sanctuary, is not concealed from the congregation accommodated in all parts of the church. It is the same problem which met the ancient Greek architects when they wanted to build large assembly halls¹, and which they got round by altering the arrangement of the columns, instead of having them in straight longitudinal lines. Such a method was not very suitable for Christian churches, and the problem was partly solved by having upper galleries, or, in St. Menas (Maryut), by the wide transepts.

Two early five aisled churches exist in Palestine (but none in Syria): the so-called Martyrium, in the Holy Sepulchre, and the Justinian Church of the Nativity², at Bethlehem. In Rome there

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(2) Crowfoot: Early Churches in Palestine, pp. 15, 16, 77f., fig. 16.
CHURCH OF ALLADRA HARAT AZ-ZUALAH

(after Butler: Coptic Churches)
are the Churches of Old St. Paul's and St. Peter's; in Greece, St. Demetrius at Salonica. Al-Mo'Allakah, as we have seen, has a second aisle on the north only, but it can hardly be considered a double aisled basilica as the plan seems to have been rather intended to suit the foundations (cf. supra).

THE CHURCH OF AL-ADRA IN HARAT-AZ-ZUAILAH, CAIRO

This church seems originally to have been a five aisled basilica, with five eastern chapels, the central one of which alone has an apse, while the others were rectangular chambers. The apse occupies the full width of the haikal, and has a tribune similar to Al-Mo'Allakah. The church was founded in the mid fourth century, but the date of the present building is uncertain. According to Al-Makrizi, the church was destroyed in 1321, and later re-built, and probably some of the old materials were used again.

The two inner rows of columns are regular, the others have been interrupted and cut short (see plan). The present entrance is through the southernmost of the chapels, but in the original plan there was probably a western entrance, and when the level of the street outside rose up gradually, this entrance had to be abandoned. An entrance about the middle of the southern wall has also been blocked.

Although there are upper galleries, the back part of the nave is screened off, and reserved for women; the reason obviously is that the congregation had diminished, and the whole space was no longer necessary. Another screen divides the men's section from the choir, and there was of course the higab. One peculiarity of the latter is

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(1) See Swift, Roman Sources of Christian Art, p.9.
(4) Simaika, Guide to the Coptic Museum, p.84. Butler, op. cit., p.273, seems to give the present church a 10th century date.
that it does not stretch in a straight line in front of all the sanctuaries, as it normally does in Coptic churches, instead the main haikal extends further into the nave, like that of some of the Nubian Churches (cf. Addendan, infra).

THE LARGE CHURCH ON THE ISLAND OF PHILAE NEAR ASWAN

The exact date of this building cannot be decided, but Christianity reached the Island early in the fourth century\(^1\), and was soon in a powerful position. Some of the Christian remains may therefore belong to an early date.

The church is a basilica of irregular shape outside, for the eastern and southern walls are out of angle with the orientation of the church (if indeed it is so)\(^2\). Two inner rows of columns, however, give the interior a symmetrical plan. The two outside rows are square piers, also parallel with the main axis, and on the west side they form a returned aisle. The gap on the south side, caused by the irregularity of the wall, is filled by an extra row of pillars which helps to support the roof. There is no apse in the eastern sanctuary, which is also irregular. A small door from it leads to a room in which there is a flight of stairs, probably leading to the upper galleries\(^3\). It is an unusual position for the stairs, but it is similar to the small church on the same island. The roof was probably of wood.

THE BASILICA OF ARNANT

This last example of the group is no longer existent, but it was visited by Pococke in the early eighteenth century\(^4\). It has

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(2) Somers Clarke, Christian Antiquities, pp.89-90.
(3) Ibid., p.89.
SECTION ON LINE C (PLATE XXX)

Looking South

SCALE 1:200

PLAN OF CHURCH IN DER SIMEON

ASWAN

Scale 1:200
several points of interest: first, the nave is too wide, compared with the double side-aisles, and it ends on both the east and west sides in a shallow apse. The east apse, only, is flanked by pilasters which must have supported the triumphal arch. There is no western entrance, but the doors are at the western ends of the longer sides, like the Nubian churches.

The Domed Basilica

The combination of a domed superstructure with the basilical ground-plan, first appears in Byzantine architecture in the fifth century. Several examples are found in Asia Minor, at Miriamlik and Bin bin Kilisse (6th century), of a later date, St. Irene, Constantinople (c.532), and several others. Outside Asia Minor there is the Church of S. Sophia in Salonica (6th century). The type does not appear in Egypt until the seventh century, perhaps following the change over from the wooden roof of the early century to the use of brick.

THE MONASTERY OF ST. SIMON, ASWAN.

The church of this monastery represents an important elaboration of the trefoil-ended hall of the fifth century, as a result of its combination with the dome. Although it dates from the seventh century, it is not too far removed from the time of the Arab conquest to show the new tendencies in Coptic architecture following that event, and in fact it belongs to the early style.

The western end is built against the rock, which is at a higher level on this side, and is occupied by some chambers approached

(1) Cf. plan in A. Badawy: Les Premières Églises d'Egypte, fig.5, p.60.
(5) Monnaie de Villard, in Baedeker's Egypt, pp.311-14, 362.
(6) Somers Clarke, op. cit., pp.97 f.
from the nave, so the usual western door of Egyptian churches is here missing. One of these rooms probably contained the stair to the upper galleries, as at Denderah (supra).

The nave is separated from the aisles by piers; on the north there are four, unequally spaced (see plan), and it seems that they were connected with arches. The two central intercolumniations are smaller, and so their arches must have been consequently lower than the outer ones. The aisle itself was crossed with three arches again irregularly spaced. The first and third bays from the west were covered with intersecting vaults, a method used to cover almost rectangular spaces without the use of wood-centering

1. The second and fourth bays had barrel vaults, the easternmost being longer than the others and extending beside the sanctuary to a chamber in the north-east corner of the church, with which it is connected by a door.

The southern aisle is almost cut off from the nave by a wall, in which there are two openings: one at the extreme west of it, and the other nearer to the east. This is undoubtedly the result of some later reconstruction, and in Monneret de Villard's restored plan the pillars on this side are symmetrical with those on the north

2. and the arrangement of the roof must have been similar too. There were upper galleries probably connected at the west end by a bridge supported on pillars, as was commonly done in Egypt (cf. Al Mo'allakah, supra). The main entrance to the church was on the north, in the second bay of the aisle, and there seems to have been two other doors on the south.

To cover the nave, a span of about twenty-four feet, must have been a problem to the architect of the church, for the Arab

(1) Ibid., p.101.
(2) Ugo Monneret de Villard: Il Monastero Di S. Simeone Presso Aswan, Milan, 1927, figs. 50, 51.
conquest deprived Egypt of her supply of imported wood, which had so far been the main roofing material. Somers Clarke\(^1\) proposes a wooden roof of the usual type, probably supported by two inner rows of columns, like the large church on the Island of Philae (supra), but there is no trace of such an arrangement. The solution adopted was to divide the nave longitudinally in two halves by two pillars situated between, and in line with, those in the centre of the lateral colonnades. Each half had its dome (cf. St. Irene, Constantinople\(^2\)). There are traces of brick vaulting in most parts of the church, used instead of wood.

The triumphal arch is comparatively narrow, for it is less than half the width of the nave. It leads into the sanctuary, which resembles the trefoils further north, except that the apses are square at ground level, then gather upwards at the corners to form an appropriate base for the half domes that covered them. The central square may have been covered with a dome, though all traces of it have disappeared. The eastern end contained several chambers, grouped round the apses, as in the White and Red Monasteries.

Strzygowski\(^3\) derives the domed-basilica type from the Armenian single-domed church, which, on entering the Mediterranean world, had to meet the demand for a women's gallery, and therefore lateral aisles were added with the matronea upstairs. The plan of St. Simeon is not at all foreign to Egypt, and except for the domes the church has a family resemblance with the two Monasteries near Sohay, and the Church near Dendereh. It would seem more likely that the use of the dome at this later period was rather suggested by

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(1) Somers Clarke, op. cit., p.102.
(3) Origin, p.69.
CRYPT OF ABU SARGAH

(after Butler: Coptic Churches)
Constantinople, where the most important domed basilicas were erected. St. Simeon stands alone in the country, its plan was never repeated again.

Crypts and Underground Churches

Two churches will be included in this group: The Crypt of Abu Sargah, and Dair El Bakarah. Another underground church has already been described: the Tomb Church in the Monastery of St. Jeremias. Architecturally, they may not be of great pretensions, but they are among the earliest Christian buildings in Egypt, and they show certain tendencies which characterize Coptic architecture throughout its history, e.g. the use of ornamental niches, pilasters, and the returned aisle.

THE CRYPT OF ABU SARGAH

Dedicated to the Virgin. This is in fact the only real crypt in Egypt. Its foundation goes back, perhaps, to the third century, though it seems to have been rebuilt in the sixth. It lies under the centre of the choir of the upper church, and part of the sanctuary, and is approached by two stairs in the northern and southern parts of that choir, leading down to the western end of the crypt.

The plan is basilical, with some peculiar features. The nave is separated from the aisles by two rows of columns, completed towards the east by short walls in line with them, and running to the eastern apse. The last column in each row actually joins this wall. The columns are not all original, they are of different heights and have a variety of capitals. The roof consists of three parallel

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(1) D. Talbot Rice: Byzantine Art, p.67.
(2) See also the White Monastery, supra, p.72.
barrel vaults, covered with pilaster.

The crypt has three semi-circular apses, similar, in a way, to the Roman cella trichora type¹. The eastern, with a semi-domed head, contains an altar, and is separated from the nave by a round arch. Strangely enough the altar is not placed centrally, but to one side of the apse, and in front of it there is a circular slab in the floor covering the sacred well, by the side of which the Holy Family is believed to have rested in their flight to Egypt². The altar of the upper church was so arranged as to fall exactly on this slab. The other two niches, slightly smaller, are in the middle of the side walls. The southern one has a marble altar, placed similarly to the eastern one. The northern has a marble slab slightly sunk, but no altar.

The eastern end of the southern aisle contains the font, with a shallow square recess in the wall to the north of it. The end of the northern aisle is widened out, but there is no niche in it.

Popular legend connects this crypt with the Holy Family, and the strange position of the altars, and other peculiarities of the plan, are probably meant to commemorate certain points of the legend.

DAIR EL BAKARAH, OR THE CONVENT OF THE PULLEY.

This is a partly built and partly rock-cut monastery, on the east bank of the Nile, about half way between Girgah and Miniah. The name indicates the way by which it could be reached in the Middle Ages, by means of a pulley³. The church (and in fact the whole monastery) is dedicated to the Virgin, and ascribed to the Age of

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(1) E. Freshfield: Cellae Trichorae, 2 vols.
St. Helena. The plan is known to us from the description of ancient travellers, particularly Curzon\(^1\).

The nave is almost square, separated from the aisles by ten columns, four on each side and two more for the returned aisle at the west. The columns carry a heavy wooden architrave. This part seems to be originally built, and not like the sanctuary, excavated in the rock. Entrance to the church is made by a long flight of stairs on the east side, leading down to the end of the southern aisle.

The sanctuary consists of a semi-circular apse occupying the full width of the nave, but higher in level. It is approached by a double flight of steps, near the top of which stand two columns. The apse is ornamented with three deep rectangular niches, and six semi-circular pilasters. Two chambers open on its sides\(^2\).

Butler remarks that there is a strange resemblance between the church and several ancient rock-cut tombs nearby\(^3\). Their vestibule is similar to the nave, with its aisles and returned aisle, the funeral chapels are like the sanctuary, and the stairs, too, are in a similar position. The Dair goes back to the earliest days of church-building, and it may have been influenced by ancient architecture. Like the Crypt of Abu Sarzah, however, it differs from churches built above ground, under usual circumstances.

Nubian Churches

The majority of the Nubian Churches are basilicas\(^4\), but the plan differs from that found in Egypt, so that they rather form a category of their own. They belong to the vaulted-basilica type,
for the roofs are often vaulted, and since Christianity did not spread into the country till a late date, the churches may have borrowed much from the new plans used in the Byzantine world\(^1\). Their main characteristics are the side entrances, at the western end of the aisles, instead of a western door; heavy piers separating the nave from the aisles; a stair in one of the rooms at the western end of the church, usually the southern, and sometimes a narrow corridor behind the apse, connecting the side-chapels (Kasr Ibrim, Figiranton\(^2\)). The dates are often difficult to fix, none of them can be earlier than the time of Justinian.

**THE NORTHERN CHURCH AT PARAS\(^3\)**

The entrance doors open into the northern and southern aisles, which are separated from the nave by thick walls. These can hardly be called arcades, for the arched openings (three on each side) are narrower than the piers separating them. At the western end there is a stair-case in the south, and an irregular chamber on the opposite side, with a niche in each wall, which may have been a guest-room. The nave and aisles are covered by vaults.

At the east end there is the haikal with an apse occupying its full width. It has the usual tribune of five circular steps and on the top of them three niches with flat lintels. The haikal communicates with the side chambers, or sacristies, by arched doorways; the southern sacristy is also connected with the aisle, but the northern is not, and its floor is lower than the haikal.

Griffith found some inscriptions in the church, dating from the ninth century\(^4\).

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THE SOUTHERN CHURCH AT FARAS

This church is dated sixth or seventh century, by Mileham\(^1\). It follows the usual plan except that the western stairs are placed centrally, with rooms to the north and south of them.

The nave is separated from the aisles by thick walls, pierced through by five narrow arches. The haikal has the tribune with the three niches at the top. The door to the south sacristy has been blocked; the north one actually contains a stair-case approached from the haikal.

THE NORTHERN CHURCH NEAR ADDENDAN (see plan)

The place lies opposite Faras, and is called by Somers Clarke Dair El Kiersh\(^2\). Each nave arcade is of five bays. The pulpit is placed against the central pier of the north side, in other cases it is usually beside the more easterly one. Nave and aisles are covered by vaults.

The tribune occupies the greater part of the haikal, almost blocking the doors to the side chambers. The altar is pushed further west and is placed between the piers of the arch of triumph. This must be the result of some late restoration. The side chambers are connected with the aisle by doors found at one side instead of a central position.

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(1) Mileham, op. cit., p.34.
(2) Christian Antiquities, pp.66 f.
CONCLUSION

The earliest surviving church in the Hinterland seems to be the Little Al Mo''allakah (III century). This is small in itself, but it is the only example in the country of what must have been a common place of worship in the first days of Christianity: the Hall Church.

Two buildings survive from the early fourth century: the Crypt of Abu Sargah, and Dair El Bakarah. Again they may not be of much architectural importance, and can hardly be considered as proto-types for any later church plan, nor do they reflect the great constructional programme of Constantine in Jerusalem and elsewhere, but they show some of the features that later on became typical of Egyptian Churches, like the returned aisle, and the decorative niches.

After that there is a gap of more than a century, which is the more regrettable as it leaves us without anything parallel with the Alexandrian Church of St. Menas, and also because this period must have been one of the greatest experimental periods in the history of Christian Church architecture.

Next in chronological order come the two Monasteries near Sohag (c.440 A.D.), and the Basilica near Dendereh (end of the V century). Their fully developed plan, a three-apsed sanctuary at the end of a long basilical hall, is almost without antecedent, and they undoubtedly show Egyptian Church architecture at its best. Some features in them resemble St. Menas, especially the narthex, and they may have been even more influenced by the methods of construction, but they still retain their place among the greatest monuments of early Christianity.
At the end of the fifth century a simpler basilical plan was adopted. It appears in Dair Abu Hennis, and at Saqqara, and recalls a type common in Syria from an early period, but in Egypt it always has an internal apse, and usually a western entrance, a closed narthex, a returned aisle, and decorative niches in the walls.

If the Church of Al Mo'allakah preserves the original sixth century arrangement, then it appears that before the Arab conquest the Coptic liturgy had already taken a distinct course, and that it required three eastern sanctuaries, instead of one.

Finally, the domed square, with all its variations, which Strzygowski considers as typical of Armenia, does not appear in Egypt, where from the beginning the basilica, or assembly church, was predominant.
ARCHITECTURAL ORIGINS

Although the development of Christianity in Egypt in the early centuries forms an important part in the general history of the Church, yet the share of the country in the evolution of Early Christian Art is neglected, and often denied. Strzygowski was not prepared to concede much initiative to native Egypt, the centres of creativeness which he regarded as particularly important being Armenia and Iran\(^1\). In more recent years, Drioton has followed similar lines: according to him, Coptic art is to be regarded as a product of Alexandria, and later of Syria\(^2\).

The history of Coptic art is still far from complete, and the architectural material is very fragmentary. The influence that Egypt exercised on other regions may not be very great, at least as far as architecture is concerned. In the first place, there was a marked tendency towards isolationism especially after Chalcedon (451), and secondly, the Arab conquest in 640-642 completely separated the country from the Christian world. Yet the churches that have survived, from the earliest period until the seventh century, show distinct qualities, and are indeed important landmarks in the history of Church architecture as a whole.

The controversy regarding the origins of early Christian art is not yet fully solved, and a good deal of confusion has resulted from the attempt of some Art Historians to classify the

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(1) Origin, pp.41, 206.
monuments of the wide area included at one time or another in the
Roman Empire, under one heading, in spite of the obvious differences
between them. It is true that religion was an important link
between them, but every region had its own traditions and hereditary
aptitudes, and as the numerous Church Councils show, there were
various interpretations of Christianity. The Church never provided,
nor could have provided, a central, all dominating government.
Ecclesiastical councils could succeed only by compromise and general
consent, the Council of Chalcedon shows what happened when the
Church tried to impose a unified creed upon all. It is therefore
misleading to think of Christian art as a parallel term with
Greek, Roman or Egyptian. There was naturally a certain amount
of inter-relation between the various regions, but most of them
show individual characteristics, so much so that it would be proper
to say that there were several styles of early Christian art.

To arrive at an answer to Strzygowski's still disputed
problem "Orient oder Rom?", it is most important to examine the
contribution of each area, and to provide secure data for it,
instead of emphasizing the importance of the one, at the expense
of the other, as so many have tended to do, notably the most
recent writer to tackle the problem, E. H. Swift, in his "Roman
Sources of Christian Art".

In the existing remains, which have greatly increased
since the time of Butler, Somers Clarke and Gayet, it is impos-
sible to trace the development of Church architecture in Egypt in
the first seven centuries of our era, from any fixed proto-types,

(1) e.g. A. J. Hamilton: Byzantine Art & Decoration; See W. R.
Lethaby, the Cambridge Ancient History, vol.III, Ch.XXI.
(2) J.B. Ward Perkins: "The Italian element in late Roman & Early
Medieval Architecture", the annual Italian lecture of the
to a fully developed style. In fact some of the earliest churches are among the most advanced, while some of the later ones appear more premature. We can, however, trace a number of sources, which exercised some influence on that development, though they vary in importance. They may be classified under four main groups:

1. The Native, or Egyptian.
2. The Classical, or Graeco-Roman.
3. The Oriental.
4. The Byzantine.

THE NATIVE ELEMENTS

Some of these were developed in the Christian period to meet the demands of the changed religion, while others seem to have descended from ancient architecture, which continued to flourish until at least the time of Decius (mid third century) and examples of which existed and were well known, particularly in the southern part of the country.

It is often said that Coptic architecture constitutes a complete break with the ancient Egyptian¹, and that the ancient art came to an end with the dying out of the religion which it served and the introduction of Christianity. The statement is only partly true. The White and Red Monasteries as well as other Churches, show that until the fifth century at least builders were still capable of carrying out work in the same style. C. R. Peers in his article on the White Monastery² argues that the similarity is not confined to outside appearance, or merely preserving the massive, geometric, box-like outlook of temples;

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(2) Archaeological Journal, vol.LXI (2nd series XI), 1904, pp.131 ff
but the method of construction and many details of the sculpture are typically Egyptian.

About 340 B.C. the Persian invasion put an end to the thirtieth and last Egyptian dynasty, and from then on started a long period of foreign rule. Various civilizations were introduced into the country to suit the taste of the invaders, but the native spirit never died out. The most important of these newcomers were the Greeks, who, wherever they went, carried with them their tongue and civilization, but Ptolemaic art was predominantly Egyptian. Even in Alexandria and other Greek centres where Greek traditions had a strong footing, they did not replace, but lived side by side with native art. Then followed the rule of the Romans, and for centuries before the spread of Christianity, Egypt was part of the Roman Empire. Yet we do not find that reflected in art.

Of course the old temple plan could not be adopted for churches, for while it served well the purposes of the old religion, it did not fulfil the requirements of Christianity. At least the vast body of the temple with its forest of pillars and its majestic interior would have made it impossible for the assembled congregation to follow the ritual performed at the altar, nor to hear the service conducted at one end of the building. Therefore, when Christians came to make use of ancient edifices as churches, they could only employ one of their courts or inner chambers, as we find, for example, at Karnak, Medinet Habu, Luxor, Gurneh and

Arment. The new outlook was itself different: the purpose of the building was not to house the image of god, but to give shelter to the worshippers, and art in general became more popular serving the interests of the whole community and not only glorifying the head of the state.

It should also be remembered that Egypt could not now afford to build the enormous buildings of ancient times. These, and even Roman temples, had been erected as a state enterprise, commissioned and paid for by the government as a memorial to the reigning sovereign. The resources of the country were employed in that direction\(^2\), which was hardly ever the case in Christian Egypt. It is therefore more likely to find the origin of some features of Egyptian churches not in temples and royal tombs, but in more humble buildings: houses, granaries and ordinary tombs. In these the main building material was brick, not stone, and it was mainly sun-dried. Brick in fact preceded stone as a building material in Egypt and continued to be used throughout the ages. Remains of many mud-brick houses of all periods are still to be found in the Upper country. It was only in the Roman period that it started to be burnt\(^3\). Brick buildings in Christian Egypt followed the same old style and contained its faults and weaknesses, namely that the bricks were laid without proper bond, and consequently it is common to see skins of brick peeling off from the mass, especially in the lower courses, when attacked by damp\(^4\). Walls depended for strength on mere thickness.

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(2) Somers Clarke: Christian Antiquities, pp.16 ff.
(3) Petrie: Egyptian Architecture, p.3.
(4) Somers Clarke, op. cit., p.30.
The main building material in Egyptian churches was brick. Stone was used, when it could be easily obtained from ancient temples, especially for columns, lintels, and pavements. In the White Monastery, the builders sometimes took the trouble to redress the slabs and remove the ancient hieroglyphics and sculptures, and showed great skill in that, but often left them as they are. There does not seem to have been any religious feeling against them.

Although the ancient architecture was mainly trabeated, like the Greek, domes and vaults were not unknown at a very early date. They were often employed for roofing areas of small proportions, and in buildings of minor importance. Petrie has shown that barrel vaults were used regularly in tombs from the sixth dynasty onwards. A dome was found in an unfinished brick tomb at Qurneh, dating from the XII dynasty. Other examples were found in the granaries behind the Ramasseum at Thebes, dating from the time of Rameses II. It was a cheap substitute for slabs of granite or stone in a country where wood was rare, and the good kinds of it had to be imported.

Their wide use soon after the Arab conquest on practically the same old method of construction and without the use of concrete, as the Romans did, suggests a continuous experience in their building. There is no reason why we should consider that they were re-introduced from outside, as might be implied from Strzygowski, it is more likely that the technique continued to be known and was always practised by native builders. In fact we

(2) Egyptian Architecture, pp.72 f. (3) Ibid., p.73.
(5) Somers Clarke describes that method as he saw it practised at the beginning of this century, op. cit., p.26-7.
(6) Origin, pp.54 f.
have a few links with the past, in the sub-structures of St. Menas (Maryût), the Crypt of Abu Sargah, and, perhaps, Al-Mo'allakah.

Although the earliest churches in Egypt had only one haikal it became customary later on to have three (rarely more) aligned along the east end of the church. The three chapels are said to represent the Trinity\(^1\). The symbolism of certain numbers was common among Christians everywhere in the early period\(^2\): four represented the evangelists, seven the sacraments, twelve the Apostles, and so forth. But the idea may have been obtained from ancient temples, which were not widely made use of till the late 5th century\(^3\). The official policy from Constantine to Theodosius II (d. 450) seems to have been to close pagan temples all over the Empire and stop sacrificing in them, though not to pull them down. However, the Christians, while not keen on turning them into churches, would not let them stand either, as the case of the Serapeum clearly shows. Most ancient temples had numerous chapels at one end, dedicated to various deities: Petrie gives the plan of a small temple of Khufu, IV dynasty, with three cells side by side at its back, the middle one being the shrine of the god, and the others probably for lesser deities\(^4\). A larger sanctuary of the II dynasty also has three cells. The temple of Sety I, at Abydos, has a row of seven cells, dedicated to seven different gods\(^5\), and the Pyramid temple of Khafrá has five.\(^6\) It is possible that Church architects were influenced by those when they built several sanctuaries and dedicated them to various saints, at the east end of the church, while none were allowed in

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(1) A. Badawy: L'Art Copte, pp.10-11.
(4) Egyptian Architecture, Pl.XXVII, fig.136. (5) Ibid., figs.138, 139.
(6) Ibid., fig.144, p.88. Other examples on p.89, figs.146, 148.
other parts of the building, like the later Western cathedrals. It has often been said that Coptic Christianity is a disguised form of the ancient native religion\(^1\). Even the Patriarchs of Alexandria did not hesitate to make use of the strong popular beliefs regarding old deities, but often tried to change only the hero of the legend and attach the same stories to a Christian martyr or saint\(^2\). Various motifs in art similarly survived in the early period.

Whether the church had one haikal (The White and Red Monasteries, St. Simeon), or more (Al-Mo'allakah), there was always a solid screen (higab) in front, concealing completely the eastern part, and communicating with it only by a central opening. The architect had it in mind that the haikal should be separated from the body of the church, raised a step above the nave, and given special attention in its decoration. Hence in the monasteries near Sohag an elaborate system of niches and ornamental columns was employed. Considering the influence of ancient architecture in these two monasteries in particular, and comparing them with the arrangement of the Theophilan church of St. Menas, with which they also have something in common, it is very likely that their architect was influenced by the shrines of ancient temples in arranging the sanctuary. It is also possible that the idea spread to Syria, Palestine and other places from Egypt itself. After the Council of Chalcedon (451) the Egyptian church allied itself with the Monophysites of Syria and Palestine, and

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(1) J. Maspero: Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie, p.28.  
(2) Neroutsos-Bey: L'Ancienne Alexandrie, p.71.
the relations between them were very friendly, as indeed they had always been. Palestinian churches began to use the Egyptian type of straight screen from the end of the sixth century.

In the period we are here concerned with (until the VII century) monastic churches do not show any distinct features, nor any peculiarities in their internal arrangement, for it is unlikely that the monasteries had their own builders, and for any work of importance they must have had to employ architects from outside. Yet there are certain features in Egyptian churches which seem to be the result of monasticism. Such, for example, is the entanglement of the church in other buildings for secular use. So instead of the church standing independently in its own church-yard, it is often surrounded by various buildings. This would be natural in monasteries where each is a complete unit in itself, containing all the requirements of the monks: ovens, mills, a refectory, kitchens, assembly halls and so on. A refectory adjoins the south side of the White and Red Monasteries. Refectories, of later date, appear regularly in the monasteries of the Natrûn Valley, attached to the church. Besides, various chambers sometimes are found round the eastern haikal, including a library, a baptistry, store-rooms, etc. We might mention here a theory of A. Badawy who thinks that these rooms were meant to separate the haikal from the outer wall, and thus to give further protection to the most important part of the church. But that could hardly have been necessary in a church inside the monastery where the surrounding

(1) See infra, 'Oriental Elements'.
(4) L'Art Copte, Cairo, 1949, p. 9.
high walls would seem to have been enough. It is more likely that since the church was the main centre of monastic life, it was equipped with the various necessities of a community life.

In the Middle Ages it became a necessity of survival to conceal the church in the neighbouring houses, so that its front can hardly be distinguished from them, as we still find in many churches in Old Cairo. During persecution, churches were the first object of hostility, but it seems that the practice in fact goes back to a much earlier time than that, and probably originated from those early monastic plans.

From the first, Egyptian churches always preserved a plain outside, a straight surface with no ornament whatever. Windows, when they appear, are small holes, high up in the wall, and except for Al Mo'allakah, the narthex is always a closed one, with one central western door. In that they resemble pagan temples, but internally, the monotony of the walls is broken by a large number of niches appearing, not only in the sanctuary, but in the nave-walls and the narthex as well. Some of these niches are square, others rounded, and they are usually flanked by pilasters, and covered with a half dome. This is a special characteristic of Egyptian churches not found anywhere else.

THE CLASSICAL OR GRAECO-ROMAN ELEMENTS

It is not easy to distinguish in Egyptian churches features that can definitely be called Roman, from those that might be attributed to Greece, for the link between Egypt and Rome was mainly through Alexandria, itself a stronghold of Hellenism. Besides, when

(1) cf. supra, Abu Hennis, White Monastery, St. Simeon, and the Nubian churches.
Augustus gave the country a special position in the Empire, owing to its great importance, assigning its government to a prefect of equestrian rank, and prevented any senator or "eques illustris" from entering without his specific permission. At the same time, he must have, at the same time, put a check on the infiltration of Roman influence into the country. Again the Romans, like the Greeks, confined themselves to the Capital and some of the other commercial centres and military outposts, leaving the natives to their own traditional methods of life, and practising their native art. We therefore do not find in Egypt anything like the Roman Imperial architecture of Syria or North Africa, baths, temples, and great palaces.

The "classical" features in Egypt can in no way be compared with those in Syrian churches, for the latter are more or less directly descended from the classical architecture of the third century B.C. onwards, at Ba'albeck and other places, which have no counterpart in Egypt. Although the Hellenism of Alexandria was affected by the intrusion of Oriental elements, it did not succumb to Roman influence. It was much more affected by the native Egyptian traditions, which present themselves clearly, mixed with Hellenistic elements, in Ptolemaic architecture. Thus the first three centuries A.D. saw in Alexandria a type of Hellenism that forms a class by itself, and differs from that of the other foundations of Alexander in the East.

Although the relations between Alexandria and Rome, in its greatness, were never very friendly, things entirely changed after

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(1) H. I. Bell: Egypt from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest, Oxford, 1948, pp. 65 f.
(2) H. C. Butler: Architecture and Other Arts, pp. 18 f.
(3) T. Fyfe: Hellenistic Architecture, p. 12; Moshy: The Arts in Ptolemaic Egypt.
the transfer of the Capital to Constantinople. Alexandria then had a close association with the Church of Rome, much more than with the eastern Capital. Thus it was in Rome with the Emperor Constans, that Athanasius took refuge for three years, when he was banished from his see. In the council of Nicaea, the first oecumenical council to be held, Rome was obviously on the side of Alexandria, defending her bishop and supporting his views. Many other examples could be quoted in that respect, but at the same time, Constantinople was always regarded with suspicion and jealousy by Alexandria, for it was a rival for supremacy in the East, whereas Rome was in the West: the supremacy of its bishop was established from the earliest times and was never afterwards challenged. There were also the personal rivalries between the bishops, like that between Theophilus and John Chrysostom.

Another source of classical influence is connected with the monasteries. For a short time towards the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth, foreign elements managed to penetrate the Monasteries of the Natrun Valley. Evagrius is one of the most important. He came to Egypt about 383 and went to Nitria. St. Jerome is another: he came about 385. Naturally the Egyptian element remained predominant, always regarded these intruders with suspicion, but they still could, for a while, bear the standard of Greek thought and philosophy, until they were eventually driven out.

Undoubtedly, the churches of Alexandria would have shown

(2) Supra, p. 17.
(3) Supra, pp. 14 f.
(5) Palladius: Historia Lausiaca, ch. XXXVIII.
(6) White: The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis, pp. 84 f.
a stronger affiliation with the classical world, than those of the upper country, and according to some, Alexandria remained for several centuries after Christ a stronghold of classicism. Indeed St. Menas (Maryut) gives some indication: the projecting transepts and the position of the altar, for example, are in contrast to normal Egyptian practice. Another church in the same region, that of the Monastery of Taposiris Magna, also has similar transepts, and it may have been regularly used in Alexandria. The particular kind of transept in the Athanasian church, divided by transverse screens, is similar to those in some Greek churches, and may have been taken from Greece itself.

The successive churches of St. Menas all had projecting apses, but a point of interest is that, while the Athanasian one had three on the east, that of Theophilus reverted to the single apse, a type more common in the West (cf. the Constantinian Churches of St. John Lateran and St. Peter's, Rome).

The Baptistry of St. Menas has been already mentioned (supra, p.5). Polygonal or circular plans were adopted for baptistries in both east and west at an early date, and are commonly traced back to the architecture of the Roman baths.

The Christian basilica, regardless of its origin, enjoyed its greatest popularity in the Graeco-Roman world. It was used in the East, but it did not have the same footing that it had in the West. There does not seem to be any reason to doubt that the plan was introduced into Egypt from there, at an early date, either directly, or through Alexandria. It was a convenient and economic...
way of building a place for worship, and in spite of the rarity of wood in the country that was not much of a problem, and it still preserved the wooden roof. For as long as wood could be imported, builders relied on a continuous supply of it, and it was only when the Arab conquest stopped that they had to modify their plans, and rely on local materials 1.

That does not mean that Egypt copied directly the basilical plan from outside, for the basilica there, as in most other regions, shows a local variation, e.g. the atrium of such Roman basilicas as St. Peter's and St. Paul's is not found except, perhaps, at Al Mo'allakah2, which is comparatively late, and its atrium is rather different from the open colonnaded court of Rome. The clerestory was hardly necessary, for in a country with a bright sky all year round, small windows are enough to provide light for the interior.

It thus seems that Egypt in the Christian period continued to receive elements from the Graeco-Roman world, and to absorb them in her art, giving them a strong local shape.

THE ORIENTAL ELEMENTS

Thanks to Strzygowski, the boundaries of the "Orient", for students of early Christian and Byzantine art, have been pushed further east beyond the shores of the Mediterranean, to include the important regions of Mesopotamia, Persia, Altai-Iran and Armenia, beside Syria and Palestine. They all received Christianity at an early date, and were affected by the church heresies, particularly Nestorianism and Monophysitism.

(2) Supra, p. 78.
The ties between Egypt and the Orient go back to very old times. It was in that direction that any expansion of the Egyptian Empire could have taken place, since the accidents of geography isolated the country on all other sides by the sea or the vast desert. From there, too, came all invaders to the Nile Valley in ancient and modern times. But the most important incident in the history of the relations between Egypt and the Orient was, perhaps, the campaign of Alexander the Great, which not only brought together a vast area and united it by a common tongue, but more important still, it removed all spiritual and cultural barriers between the regions for the first time. It thus had a strong and long-lasting effect on them, and the Greek civilization which it established was to live and flourish for centuries.

Gradually, however, the Greek spirit died out, and the native elements grew in strength. Thus when this art found its way back to the Mediterranean world centuries afterwards, by the trade routes through the caravan cities of Dura, Palmyra etc., it had greatly changed in form.

As far as we are here concerned, the limits of this wide area can be made narrower. The Altai-Iran region, and Armenia, may be excluded, for the church-types that Strzygowski considers as particularly representative of their native art are not known in Egypt in the early centuries, and at any rate the examples that he mentions are reconstructions belonging to the seventh century or even later, while the buildings of the early centuries no longer exist.

Mesopotamia deserves more attention, and after the eighth century it certainly exercised a great influence on Egypt. Its alluvial mud provided an excellent material for brick-making, and for use as mortar, so it was not one of the stone-using regions for early church building.

The excavations at Ctesiphon and Hira, have brought to light several churches dating from the sixth and seventh century. Their plan is basilical, nave and aisles being covered by barrel vaults, with doors at the sides instead of the western end, and at the east they have three rectangular chambers without apses. It seems that the churches in southern Mesopotamia always avoided the eastern apses. This plan differs greatly from the Egyptian type, and its proto-types are to be sought, perhaps, in the temples of Assyria and Babylon.

Another argument put forward in favour of a Mesopotamian influence on the early Christian architecture of Egypt, is based on techniques, particularly the use of the squinch, as a means of supporting a dome over a square place. Squinches are used in the substructures of St. Menas, Maryut, and are compared by some with those in the Palaces of Firuz-abad and Sarvistan, where they appear in a well developed form. These will be discussed in the following chapter, when dealing with the dome, but it will suffice here to

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make two reservations. First, it would be dangerous to argue on the mere similarity in technique, especially when it seems that all over the Christian world attempts were being made, even before the first century A.D., to turn a square space into a suitable base for a domed roof; the squinch was one of several devices tried. Secondly, there is by no means a general agreement on the exact date of the Sassanian palaces, Firuzabad is variously dated to between the third and seventh centuries A.D.; Sarvistan is almost certainly later than the fifth century. The squinches of St. Menas are, however, modest, and it is not till several centuries later that the squinch appears again in Egypt in the monasteries of the Natrun Valley and elsewhere.

Stronger claims are made for Syria for a share in the evolution of the early Egyptian church plan, and one type in particular can be traced back to it. This is the single-apsed church, with a rectangular narrow chamber on each side of the haikal. That to the north is the 'prothesis', or the place for the preparation of the holy bread and wine, for later service at the altar. The southern chamber is the 'diaconicon', a vestry where the sacred utensils, vestiments, and so on were preserved when they were not needed for use at the service. The type is used in Egypt from about the end of the fifth century, whereas in Syria it is over a century older. The similarity, however, does not go beyond the plan, and while the Syrian churches described by Butler\(^1\) are well-built, stone structures, with colonnades outside, and windows for light, the Egyptian ones are mostly badly built, of poor materials (cf. the Main Church at Saqqara, supra), devoid of any ornament on the outside, with little

\(^1\) H. C. Butler: Architecture and other Arts.
or no windows, and the eastern apse never seen on the outside. Undoubtedly the local traditions, which had always managed to absorb foreign elements and give them a native shape, were still powerful and of great influence.

The fifth century was a time when relations between Egypt and Syria were strongest, especially when the Council of Chalcedon in 451 gave them common grounds for uniting in their opposition to the official creed. The number of Syrian monks in the Fayyum, at Oxyrhynchus, and in the Thebaid must have been great, as is clearly shown by the Syriac documents found there. In the Natrun Valley the Syrians had their own monastery in the eighth century, but they must have been there in sufficient numbers even before then.

Thus the Syrian elements in the art of Christian Egypt, which are being constantly claimed by many archaeologists, are easier to recognize than any others.

THE BYZANTINE ELEMENTS

Those who style early Coptic architecture as Byzantine, fail to recognize the fundamental difference between the two. The Byzantine elements could not really have begun to show themselves in Egypt till the beginning of the sixth century. In fact the Byzantine style was hardly born at all before the middle of the fifth century, that is halfway between Constantine and Justinian, and it only reached full development for the first time under Justinian. Soon afterwards, by the middle of the seventh century, Egypt was lost to the Arabs. Moreover, the racial feeling of the

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(4) Lethaby, The Cambridge Medieval History, Vol.III, Ch.XXI.
Egyptians and their hatred of the crushing domination of Byzantium was always increasing, until it reached the climax at Chalcedon. So the relations with the Empire were hardly ever good for long enough to allow for the penetration of Byzantine art into the country. It is significant that when the Prophet sent his messengers to the neighbouring countries, inviting them to embrace Islam\textsuperscript{1}, Egypt was one of the four countries that received his message, the other three being Byzantium, Persia and Abyssinia, as if Egypt were not part of the Empire, and in fact the link had by that time become almost nominal.

Justinian did not confine his building activities to the Capitāl, but enriched all parts of the Empire with great buildings, many of which are still to be found in Jerusalem, Greece, Italy and elsewhere. In Egypt he appointed the Patriarch as prefect at the same time, and there must have been some, especially in Alexandria, who remained Orthodox. But there is no trace in the country of the true Byzantine architecture, nor does the remaining sculpture show any sign of Byzantine influence\textsuperscript{2}.

Only in Nubia does it seem that the builders owed much to the plans used for churches elsewhere, since Christianity was not introduced till the middle of the sixth century, when church plans had already passed the experimental stage. Some of the Nubian churches are built on a centralized plan, with a dome covering the central nave, and vaults over the aisles, instead of a wooden roof (Dair Ash El Fadelah)\textsuperscript{3}, and they must have been influenced by the

\textsuperscript{(2)} Ward Perkins: St. Menas, p.64. \textsuperscript{(3)} supra, p.55.
domed architecture of Byzantine churches which had reached the zenith at that time.¹

It is easy to pick out certain elements in early Egyptian churches and trace them back to ancient Egypt, Rome, Greece, Syria, Mesopotamia, or Constantinople. It would have been strange indeed if such elements did not exist, for no architecture at an advanced level can break away completely from its predecessors, or keep aloof from contemporary trends in art. Most of the churches show one or the other of these elements, but beside it another "indigenous" element shows itself clearly, and gives the church a distinctive special character.

The scattered monuments cannot be claimed to give a complete picture, yet architecture is perhaps a more secure medium to form an opinion on the development of Early Christian art in Egypt than, for example, sculpture, a good deal of which is claimed by Kitzinger² and Guibell³ to be imported.

But before we end this chapter on architectural origins, we must consider the basilical plan as it appears in Egypt.

THE BASILICA

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¹ Miteham: Churches in Lower Nubia, p.7.
³ Inibell: Saggara, 1908-9; 1909-10, Cairo, 1912, Introduction.
The origin of the Christian basilica has been the subject of much study and a good deal of controversy. Ever since the beginning of the century, when Strzygowski challenged the old beliefs and produced his bold theories about the contribution of the "East" to early Christian art, the discussion has been going on. Thus while great credit is due to him for directing the attention of scholars to the contributions of the lands beyond the confines of the Roman-Hellenistic world, his extreme views were bound to produce a sharp re-action, and the claims of Rome and the Roman world as a whole were upheld in equally vigorous terms.

Countless theories, some of them based on new hypotheses, have thus been produced, only to be soon rejected when they could give no explanation to some of the basic features in the early churches. A brief survey of these can be found in Swift's Roman Sources of Christian Art,¹ as well as other standard works,² and it would be pointless to go through them here in detail.

Before attempting any solution to the problem, the first question that presents itself is whether the basilical plan was at all an invention of Constantine's architects. The answer is certainly in the negative, and the often-quoted letter of Constantine, in connection with the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, in which he instructs Bishop Macarius to build the finest basilica that had yet been seen,² without giving any further

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¹ pp. 9-30
² See, for example, G. Baldwin Brown: From Schola to Cathedral, Edinburgh, 1886, pp. 8f.
details, is enough proof that the type must have been already a familiar one. The plan in fact appears fully developed in the time of Constantine, and cannot be considered to have come into being at once.

Another point to remember is that the regular church had become an established institution before the so-called Peace of the Church. Eusebius, referring to the period before Diocletian's severe persecution in A.D.303, says that the Christians "no longer content with the ancient buildings, erected spacious churches from the foundation in all cities."¹ The nature of these buildings cannot be decided for none of them could be expected to survive the numerous persecutions, but they were the first attempt to build a place suitable for Christian worship as well as for the meeting of the faithful, and their influence on later architecture cannot be over-emphasized.

But where did the earliest Christians meet? They met in many places: in synagogues, and Christ Himself preached there. Christianity was, after all, an offshoot of Judaism, and its first recruits were from among the Jews of Palestine. They met in private houses, Roman, Greek, Hellenistic or otherwise, for we cannot suppose that houses were of the same type everywhere. The Scriptures and writings of the early Church Fathers are full of evidence for that practice. Again they met in the Scholae, or club houses of Roman secret societies, and Baldwin Brown has, long ago, emphasized their importance, and argued that they were specifically built for public meetings². St. Paul preached for some time in the schola of a certain Tyrannus, in Ephesus³. By the middle of

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the third century, the Roman Government began to feel the danger of Christianity and to take drastic measures to combat it. Valerius forbade all Christian assemblies, and also visits to the cemeteries, since the martyr-cult had made a deep impression on Christians from the earliest times. These burial places were henceforth made underground, in the catacombs, which became at the same time meeting places, and their chapels and oratories were used for the service.

The first three centuries A.D. were, therefore, an experimental period in Christian architecture, in which the place of worship was not always the same everywhere, and even in the same region there were various types of 'churches'. To point to any particular one of them as the prototype of the Christian basilica would be impossible. They all seem to have left their mark on later architecture, though the process of development naturally continued throughout the ages.

At the same time there is no reason why the Christian architects of the fourth century should not have made use of the experience gained by past centuries. The problem of sheltering a big assembly, for any purpose, was not a new one and the solution applied to it differed from country to country. The oldest known large-scale buildings in this respect are, perhaps, the hypostyle Halls of ancient Egypt. Two examples may be mentioned, both in the Temple of Karnak: the Festal Hall of Thotmes III, and the Great Hypostyle Hall which was added later on by Rameses III. They are alike in their internal arrangement, with an outer range of square

(1) Swift: Roman Sources, Fig.13, p.24.
piers, carried all round the inside of the walls, in other words, they have two rows returned at the shorter ends. The two inner rows of columns are bigger and higher to allow for a clerestory. The Throne rooms of the Pharaonic palaces had a similar system of lighting by means of a clerestory, so that such a plan was well established in Egypt.

This recalls Vitruvius' passage about the 'Oecus Aegyptiacus', in which he is apparently referring to the upper class houses, or the royal palaces in Ptolemaic Alexandria, of which we have, unfortunately, no definite knowledge, but at any rate they seem to have preserved the longitudinal colonnade and clerestory lighting. It is very likely that the Romans borrowed the clerestory from this ready source in Hellenistic Alexandria.

The Greeks of the Hellenistic period tended to give their places of assembly a wide rectangular (or circular) shape, unlike the long narrow hall preferred by the Christian architects. Thus the Hypostyle Hall at Delos consists of rows of columns parallel with the walls. Instead of this monotonous arrangement, they soon arrived at more convenient plans. In the Thersilion, or Assembly Hall of the Ten Thousand Arcadians, at Megapoli (IV century), the seats are arranged parallel with three sides of the hall, leaving one of the long sides free for a platform. A later hall is the Ecclesiasterion of Priene (Asia Minor), erected c.200 B.C., similarly arranged.

(2) American Journal of Archaeology, Vol.XII, 1918, p.75.
(3) De Architectura, VII, iii, 8-9.
(4) Swift, op. cit., Fig.10, p.22.
(6) Ibid.
The Roman civil basilicas had much resemblance with the early Christian ones, although again it would be futile to carry out a detailed comparison between the two, since there are important differences as well. These pagan basilicas, attached to the forum, were used as law courts and for the transaction of all sorts of business. They often consisted of a nave and two aisles, with an apse at one end provided with a tribunal to seat the presiding judge. Two basilicas were in the Roman Forum: the Basilica Julia, begun by Julius Caesar and rebuilt again later on, and the Basilica Aemilia. The last, and largest, of the Roman Imperial basilicas was the Basilica Nova, begun by Maxentius and finished by Constantine c.312. Its main characteristic is that it is roofed throughout by great barrel vaults.

Whatever the word 'basilica' might originally have signified to the Greeks, when it passed on to the Romans, it does not seem to have been associated with a particular type of building. The civil basilicas, did not follow a definite plan, besides there were private basilicas greatly differing in their arrangement. It was in fact applied to any large building of which the roof was supported by interior rows of columns. It was perhaps this varied employment of the word among the Romans which made the Christians not hesitate to use it for their place of worship.

The basilical plan was widely used everywhere until about the sixth century. In the West (cf. Old St. Peter's, St. Paul's, and St. John Lateran) it consists of a three- or five-aisled hall,

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(2) Ibid., pp.212-5.
with the central aisle higher than the side ones and lit by clerestories. At the eastern end there is usually a transept at right angles with the nave and in the eastern wall a projecting apse, with rows of seats in it for the clergy. The regular roof is a wooden gabled one. To the west of the church there is often an open court or atrium, with a fountain for ablutions in the middle. There is no doubt that this plan is more typical of Rome than anywhere else, and though it was probably much influenced by pagan architecture there the theories advocated by Rivoira and, lately, Swift, of a Roman origin in the narrowest sense of the word, are rather unconvincing, and the fact still remains that the churches show a complete diversion from the principles of vaulted architecture which are well demonstrated in the Roman baths, and which reached the height in the Basilica Nova. The shifting of the centre of power to the East must have compelled the architects to look for cheaper materials, and they may have found guidance in the practices of the Hellenistic cities of the East, although with our limited knowledge of Hellenistic architecture it is difficult to say how far that is the case. Once established, the wooden roof remained an important feature of Christian churches in most regions, for centuries.

Early Syrian basilicas form another group. The atrium is not found there, nor the transepts. The apse is sometimes of the projecting type, especially in the North, sometimes internal, and

(1) Swift, op. cit., p.28; Rivoira, op. cit., pp.226-8; cf. Ward Perkins: The Italian Element in Late Roman and Early Medieval Architecture, Proceedings of the British Academy, vol.XXIII, 1948, also Axel Boethius: Roman Architecture from its Classicistic to its Late Imperial Phase, Goteborgs Hogskolas Arsskrift, vol.XLVII, 1941 (8).
(2) Dalton: East Christian Art, and Byzantine Art and Archaeology has strongly defended the contribution of the Hellenistic East to Early Christian Art.
in some cases it is omitted altogether. But the most outstanding difference between them and the Roman basilicas is the appearance of side chapels flanking the apse, which are not known in Rome. These chapels, the prothesis and diaconicon, may be rectangular or they may have eastern apses too. Syria does not seem to have known the clerestory system of lighting, the churches usually had big windows.

The churches of inner Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia form a third group, considered by Dalton\(^1\) as of oriental origin, and traced back by him to the Hittite architecture. They are distinguished by having a vaulted roof, consequently piers are often used instead of columns as better able to support the vaults. The side doors, instead of the western, are also one of their features.

As regards Egypt, a few of its churches may be considered as a modified version of one or the other of these groups, particularly St. Menas, and Abu Hennis, but generally speaking they form a group of their own. They preserved the western entrance, usually through a narthex of the closed type. The side aisles are often narrow with gallery for women above them. The haikal is completely separated from the body of the church, and always has its internal apse. The tribunal does not appear in the early churches, though it became later on a regular feature. But the main characteristic which distinguishes them is perhaps the returned aisle. Numerous examples can be cited: Dair El Bakara,

\(^{1}\) East Christian Art, p.90.
the churches in the Monastery of St. Jeremias at Saqqara, the White and Red Monasteries, and the Basilica near Denderah. In the last three, moreover, the side columns are returned on both sides so that they are like the ancient Egyptian temples, or some of the Hellenistic halls such as the Ecclesiasterion at Priene (supra), or again some of the early Synagogues. In Egyptian churches they are probably of native origin, and from there they probably passed on to churches elsewhere. The most important group of churches in Egypt is:

THE TREFOIL-ENDED BASILICA

This is one of the most important variations of the basilical plan. Three of the earliest, and largest examples are found in Egypt, so that a word about their origin is, perhaps, needed. Some have suggested that the idea was an importation, and that the plan is related to examples elsewhere.

(1) Strzygowski derives it, and in that he is followed by Dalton, from the niche-buttressed square of Armenia. He argues that when this required expansion, for congregational purposes, the western apse was removed, and replaced by a long nave. Two serious objections arise to this theory: first the examples from Armenia and North Mesopotamia are all of doubtful antiquity, and none of them seems to be earlier than those from Egypt. Secondly, Strzygowski gives the trefoil a definite structural function, namely to support and buttress the central dome. The White and Red

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(1) Swift, op. cit., fig. 9.
Monasteries and also the Church near Dendereh, were almost certainly designed with a wooden roof; the domes were constructed only in the thirteenth century, perhaps because of the lack of good wood. The apses themselves are buttressed with the chambers grouped round them at the east end of the church.

(2) Another theory derives the plan from the Imperial Roman architecture in the provinces, or in Rome itself, where perhaps the earliest triple-apsed structures are to be found in mausoleums and memorial chapels. One example occurs in the calidarium of the Roman baths at Lambessa, Algeria, and several in Tunisia: Tabessa, Thelepta, Sidi Mohammed El-Gebioui etc., but it is doubtful if these go back to the fifth century, and moreover they do not combine the trefoil with the long basilica. In Rome, there are the three ruined chapels, or Cellae Trichorae, in the Cemetery of Callixtus, on the Via Appia, near Rome. They have been dated to the third and fourth centuries, but again may be later. The influence of underground worship on the development of Christian architecture has often been emphasized, but even Swift, who has championed the contribution of Rome to Early Christian art, rejects this derivation. These chapels were not used as a regular place of worship, but only in times of persecution, and perhaps on some special occasions like the anniversary of the martyrdom of the saint buried there. Their influence on the arrangement of later churches is, therefore, very doubtful.

(5) Swift: Roman Sources, pp.16 f.
(3) Syria, too, has been suggested as the place of origin. Trefoil plans were often used for throne rooms and audience halls there. An example is found in the Episcopal Palace at Bosra, in the Hauran, probably from the early sixth century, and the Palace of Qasr Ibn Wardan, built in 564, has a trefoil on the ground floor. These may, of course, reflect an earlier tradition in Syrian architecture.

Another line of investigation points to the Holy Land, and we are told that Shenoudi wanted his monastery to be like Jerusalem. The trefoil of the Church of the Nativity is Justinianic in date; the Constantinian church, which was destroyed in the sixth century, did not have this kind of sanctuary, as some had suggested. Perhaps a better argument for an antecedent can be made in favour of the Church of St. John the Baptist, at Jerusalem, built by Empress Eudocia, 450-460. But that, too, may belong to a reconstruction of Justinian, and even if it does not, it would be contemporary or slightly later than the monasteries near Sohag.

(4) A. Badawy thinks that the trefoil was developed from some rock-cut temples of the Middle and New Kingdoms. Indeed the influence of ancient architecture on the White and Red Monasteries is great, especially on the outside appearance, and method of construction, but their internal arrangement can hardly be said to have been influenced by ancient temples.

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(2) Ibid., pp.255-260.
(4) Crowfoot: Early Churches in Palestine, pp.22, 26, 77-85; W. Schultz, ed., The Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem, Byzantine Research Fund, London, 1910, Ch.II.
(5) A. Badawy: L'Art Copte, les influences egyptienne, Cairo, 1949, p.3.
Creswell points out that the best and earliest examples of the triple-apsed basilica come from Egypt. It therefore seems logical to look for the prototype of the plan in the country itself. The only big church left there, that is definitely anterior to the group of trefoils in the south, is the Basilica of St. Menas, Maryut, and fortunately both the archaeological and historical evidences prove the close connection between it and the White Monastery, the largest and, most likely, the oldest of the three. The Theophilan Church of St. Menas was built a few decades earlier than the White Monastery. At that time Alexandria was in close contact with the flourishing monasticism of the Upper Country. Shenoudi himself was at Ephesus in 431, with the delegates of the Alexandrian church, and on his way back, he may have visited the famous church of St. Menas, as he visited the Monasteries of the Natrun Valley, and got acquainted with its ingenious plan.

There is much similarity in the architecture of the two. The narthex of St. Menas with its circular end, covered with a semi-dome, and ornamented with niches, also the position and arrangement of the ambon, in the centre of the nave, are almost exactly reproduced in the south. It must be said, however, that the plan, when used in the hinterland was modified and given a native shape: the lateral apses, which replaced the arms of the transept, were confined within the perimeter of the rectangle, and not allowed to break the straight external walls. The altar was

placed inside its sanctuary, behind the triumphal arch, instead of being outside in the open, surrounded by a low chancel screen. Outside, the whole building preserved a strong native character, hardly distinguishable from the ancient temples.

Thus the trefoil churches seem to represent a natural development of architecture in Egypt, and though single elements may be picked out, and regarded as an importation from other buildings, the resultant whole shows a plan that was first used and reached full development in Egypt, within the fifth century.
CHAPTER FOUR

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES AND DETAILS

Having discussed the main sources from which the style of the Egyptian churches emerged, and the currents which later on had an influence on its development, we can now examine the component parts of these churches to find out whether they are similar to churches elsewhere or whether their elements may be considered indigenous to the country.

THE DOME

The problem of the dome in Christian architecture is even more complicated than that of the basilica, and during the last three-quarters of a century archaeologists have explored every structure with a domical-shaped roof from the tombs in the Royal Cemetery at Ur in Mesopotamia, dating from the third millennium B.C. to the mud-brick domes built on tombs and granaries in Egypt from at least 1500 B.C., to structures in Assyria, Babylon, Sassanid Persia and Rome, all of which had domes of various shapes from different periods. \(^1\) Although most of these hardly have any bearing on our subject, they still show that the dome as such had been known

\(^1\) Creswell: Early Muslim Architecture, vol.1., pp.304f. Swift: Roman Sources, pp.85f.
from times immemorial, and had a scattered use over a very wide area, in differing stages of development. So neither in origin nor in development is it confined to any one area.

The easier use of the dome is to place it over a circular plan, and it is clear that the Romans had a large share in the development of this form: the Pantheon alone, reconstructed by Hadrian in the first quarter of the second century A.D. is enough to show the mastery that the Romans attained in this field. But the claims of Rome as the sole originator of this plan have been shaken with the discovery of early circular domed buildings in many regions. In the East they were found at Constantinople, Perzamon and Antioch among others,¹ and in North Africa in the baths at Lepcis Magna.²

Under Christianity buildings of a circular plan were taken over for Churches: St. Constanza in Rome, built by Constantine between 324-326, was one of the first. But the plan was widely used for baptisteries and martyria,³ in which the ordinary long basilical plan would have been less suitable: the Rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre, built by Constantine, St. George at Zorah, in the Haman district of Southern Syria (515 A.D.), San Vitale, Ravenna (526-47), etc.

In the early period, the Christians required two types of building: the large basilica, dedicated to the divine service, and

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¹ Talbot Rice: Byzantine Art, p 61 n.2; Ward Perkins, Italian Element.
the central-planned martyria of the heroic dead. Only in special cases like the Holy Sepulchre, were the latter required to be of considerable size. After the Peace of the Church, the cult of the martyrs and the tendency to pay them greater honour, gained more popularity, and therefore, the original small sepulchral shrines became insufficient in size.

There is one point that might be discussed here, namely the sacred aspects of the domical shape, which are greatly emphasized by Swift. He argues that the dome was not a structural expedience, and that its use was not governed by utilitarian or aesthetic interests, but that the domical shape had a symbolic significance, and that this was one of the main factors for its widespread use from the fifth century onwards.

In Syria and Palestine in particular, the dome had a widespread use. There is evidence that wooden domes were used to cover a large number of buildings, though here again the literary evidence cannot always be taken as conclusive, and unfortunately, except in very few cases, archaeological evidence is entirely lacking. In Egypt, there is evidence for the popularity of the dome for covering square mortuary chapels and oratories in the fourth and fifth centuries. Some have been found at El Bagawat,

(2) Swift: Roman Sources.
(3) W. de Back: Materiaux, fig.31, illustrated in Smith: The Dome, figs. 85,86.
and at Kharga.

Yet the symbolic value of the domical shape in Christian architecture of the early centuries should not be over emphasised. It should be remembered that all over the Roman world, domes were mainly used for secular buildings and especially baths. In fact it seems that only in the fifth century and later did the dome have such a wide and important application.

The central plan had its limitations and the dome could not be widely used until a method had been found to accommodate it securely on a square space. One of the easiest solutions is to place a flat slab or a beam of wood, of a reasonable length, across each angle. This is naturally an unsatisfactory device, but it was widely used in Egypt in the churches of the Natrun Valley and elsewhere, from about the ninth century. A better, though not a complete, solution is the squinch, which, in the simple form, is

(1) Freshfield: Cellae Trichorae, vol.II, pl.50: Smith, op.cit., fig.87.
(2) For a review of the vast literature on the subject, see Creswell: Early Muslim Architecture, vol.II, p.101.
an arch springing from the top of two adjacent walls and spanning the angle between them. Thus in effect it turns the square into an octagon on which a dome could be erected. The best method is to erect a spherical triangular pendentive which fills up the gap between the base of the dome and the corner of the square perfectly. This pendentive is a spherical triangle rising at the corners and supported on either side by the walls of the square. The top of it should form an exactly round setting for the dome. It must be kept in mind that the pendentive does not take its full shape until the distinction between its curve and that of the dome above has been realized. It should not be mixed with what is called "the merging pendentive".

In spite of Swift's detailed argument, and if we exclude domical vaults (the Domus Augustana A.D.85), which are far inferior to the true pendentive, it seems that the earliest occurrence of both the squinch and the spherical triangular pendentive in Christian architecture, as far as can be judged from actually existing monuments, is in the substructures of the Church of St. Menas in the Maryut, dating from the first decade of the fifth century\(^1\). They are found in the tomb chamber itself, and the neighbouring chapel.

Earlier than that, however, is the Sassanian Palace of Firuzabad, which may be as early as the third century\(^2\), though that is in no way certain. The dome is accommodated on well developed squinches, which betray a long tradition of their use. Creswell and others are inclined to consider Mesopotamia as the

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(1) Supra, p.51.
(2) Creswell, op. cit., p.105; Dalton: Early Christian Art, pp.78, 82.
place of origin for the squinch, and it certainly produces some fine examples of it.

As regards the pendentive, Creswell has put a strong case for Syria, where he cites numerous cases, the Tomb at Kasr-el-Nueijis near Amman (end of the third century), the West Baths at Jerash (end of the second or the beginning of the third century), the Tomb near Amman (probably end of the first century), the Baths at Brad (end of the third or the fourth century) and several others. In fact H. C. Butler went beyond that and claimed that "in Syria the native of to-day accommodates his circular dome to his square wall with perfect ease, adjusting its angles often by cross pieces and quite as often by veritable pendentives, both methods were almost certainly employed by the builders of 1500 years ago."2

By the fifth century the squinch and pendentive were widely used in East and West. But the question naturally arises: why did the Romans, who developed architecture to such high standards, not produce the pendentive at the early period, and some writers have gone so far as to say that "the Romans would have solved the problem of adjusting a dome over a square, had it appealed to them."3 They simply did not need to, since from the early centuries A.D., they concentrated on polygonal plans, and unlike Mesopotamia for example, discarded the square ones.4

The long and protracted discussion on domed buildings is still far from concluded, but at least some points have become clear. Thus the pendentive, the final solution for a dome over a

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2 H. C. Butler: Syria, Division II, B, Northern Syria, p. 3. In contrast, Strzygowski (L'Ancien Art Chrétien de Syrie, Paris, 1936, p. 100) asserts that the dome over pendentive originated in Egypt, and from there passed to Syria.
4 Swift, op. cit., p. 118.
square space, is clearly neither an invention nor a discovery, but merely the development of long existing architectural features. Although it was arrived at long before Justinian, it was not much needed, as the dome itself was only sporadically used. Religious architecture tends to be conservative, and innovations in it are very slow. As regards S. Sophia itself, it is useless to confine within one single line of development the evolution of such a complex architectural and constructional system, which may have drawn from a variety of sources.

The dome on pendentives in the Shrine of St. Menas, is a discovery of great importance. They are modest in themselves, but they prove that, besides wooden roofs, brick coverings were required at least for some special cases, as in fact they had been in the old days.

THE VAULT

The more natural way to cover a rectangular space is not the dome, but the vault, and there is evidence that it was used all over the Middle East, particularly in Egypt and Mesopotamia, from very early times.

The ancient builders of Egypt constructed vaults of stone or mud-brick, and in the latter case the alluvial mud of the Nile provided a good substance for both bricks and mortar. It seems that they only knew the tunnel vault, which is also the type that continued to be build in Christian times, with the possible

(2) Rivoira: Roman Architecture, p.29; Swift: Roman Sources, pp.85 f.
(3) Swift, op. cit., p.89; see Petrie: Egyptian Architecture, p.72 and Fig.114.
exception of St. Simeon at Aswan (supra p.83).

The method of construction is shown in the vault covering the stair-case, which leads down to the tomb of St. Menas, in his shrine in the Maryut. A photograph of it is given by Ward Perkins (Papers of the British School at Rome, Vol.XVII, 1949, Pl.V). The difficulty which the builders had to deal with was not the building of the vault, but having to do so without wood-centering. So, in order to reduce the span, the lower courses are laid flat, each one slightly overhanging the one underneath in a corbelled manner, and then the bricks at the crown are laid on edge. The technique is the traditional one in Egypt, and is obviously of great antiquity\(^1\), being preserved generation after generation.

9. The vaults in the substructures of St. Menas date from the reconstruction of Theophilus. Others of uncertain date are found in the crypt of Abu Sargah, Al Mo'allakah, and later churches. Lethaby is in favour of giving the vault an Egyptian origin\(^2\), and he believes that it was Alexandria which transmitted it, together with other forms of brick-building, to Constantinople and the West. Strzygowski, on the contrary, thinks that it originated in Mesopotamia where, apart from churches, vaults were also widely used in Sassanian and Parthian architecture\(^3\). But there does not seem to be much point in insisting on either claim, especially as there is no evidence that the vault was much in use in early Christian Egypt, and when it appears in minor buildings, it preserves a typically local shape.

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(3) Strzygowski: Origin of Christian Church Art, p.76.
ORIENTATION.

From very early times, sunrise and "orientation" were regarded as very important, and taken into consideration when designing a religious building or even an ordinary house.¹ It seems that in the Constantinian churches the western orientation was more common, that is to say they had a western apse and an eastern entrance, in contrast to later practice. In fact Rivoira² tells us that this arrangement was demanded by the liturgy, thus St. John Lateran, and Old St. Paul's were oriented to the west. He maintains that it was the Church of Ravenna which, afterwards, changed the orientation to the east and made it a fixed rule, the earliest instance being the Basilica Ursiana (370-384). As late as the sixth century the eastern orientation had not yet become universal, and S. Sophia in Constantinople, one of the most important churches to be built is not oriented.³

The idea was probably of oriental origin,⁴ and the Sun Cult

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(4) D. Talbot Rice: Byzantine Arts, p.58.
common in several places especially Egypt and Persia, required the worshippers to face the east in praying.

The great majority of Egyptian Churches are oriented to the east, sometimes accurately as in the case of St. Menas, and sometimes only approximately, that being probably necessitated by some older remains or some peculiarity of the site itself. Even when in the case of Dair El Bakara (supra), the stair leading to the church had to be put on the east side, the internal arrangement was still planned in such a way that the apse kept its eastern position. Very few churches in Egypt show an exception, but one is the small church at Philae, the orientation of which is very much to the north. This was no doubt controlled by the existing streets, and surrounding buildings. It is possible that the orientation of churches spread to Rome and the West from Egypt itself, where it had always been observed from the earliest times.

At this point we may refer to one of the most attractive, though it is rather far-fetched, theories on the origin of the Christian basilica. It was proposed some forty years ago by the French Scholar, Gabriel Leroux, and Swift has built a good deal of argument on it. Leroux tried to trace all the ancient buildings which used columns to support the roof, to the most primitive dwelling huts built by mankind. Of these he could distinguish two basic kinds: the Eastern, used by Egyptians and other people in the East, which has the main entrance on one of the long sides,

(1) Somers Clarke: Christian Antiquities, p. 89.
and the Western, used in prehistoric times in Greece, Italy and the Balkans, which has its entrance at one of the shorter sides. It is a long detailed discussion, but what Leroux was driving at, is that the Christian basilica has its doors usually on a short side, so it belongs to the western and not the eastern category.

The arrangement of any building is mainly determined by its function\(^1\), for the architect naturally tries to make it as convenient and as suitable for its purpose as he can. The differences between the early Christian churches were accompanied by differences in the liturgy, and it will be enough to compare a church in Rome with another in Greece, Syria or Egypt. Subsequent changes in the liturgy at once affected the internal arrangement of the building, and required a modification. Since the place for the altar was at one end of the church, usually the eastern, it was a matter of convenience to make the main entrance in the opposite side, or at least towards it. In larger churches subsidiary doors are found on the north and south as well.

In the transepted churches of the West, people seated in the transepts would have been facing the north or the south, and this was probably one of the reasons why the plan was avoided in the East where strict orientation was deeply rooted, from very old times.

THE APSE

The church apse is probably one of the features that were directly inspired by Roman architecture\(^2\). There was a marked

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(2) Swift, op. cit., p.79; Ward Perkins: The Italian Element.
tendency in the architecture of the Empire, from about the time of Nero, to depart from the traditional geometric plans, and to introduce circular and polygonal ones. The use of concrete helped a good deal in that respect, and made it possible to break up the straight walls by niches and exedrae.

In churches sometimes the eastern end of the nave was itself turned into an apse and thus formed the sanctuary, and sometimes the apsidal recess was added to a square chamber. In cases where the apse was allowed to appear outside the eastern wall, it was often given a polygonal shape, in spite of its circular plan inside (the Church of the Holy Apostles at Salonica, S. Sophia at Constantinople, Bosra Cathedral, St. Theodore at Athens, and the Basilica Ursiana at Ravenna). Around the curved walls were rows of raised seats for the presbyters of the church, with the throne of the bishop in the centre. Tribunes - as they are called - were known everywhere in the early Christian world, but in Egypt they continued to be used for a long time, and are thus found in most of the churches in Old Cairo.

Apart from St. Menas, only one church in Egypt has the projecting apse: Dair El Malak, at Nakada in the south. It is clearly an intruder and may be late in date. The apse is usually circular, but in Sitt Barbara it is seven-sided. When the Coptic churches began to have three haikals, the side ones, too, had their tribunes. In Al Mo'allakah these are too narrow to be any real use, and are perhaps merely traditional.

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(2) Patricolo and Monneret de Villard: The Church of Sitt Barbara, p.29.
On the top of the tribune, the apse wall has niches, usually three in number, and even if the idea of having these was originally a Roman one, it nowhere enjoyed the wide use that it had in Egypt. In some cases, like the White and Red Monasteries, these niches are elaborately decorated with columns and architraves, but usually they are simple square or round recesses covered with half domes.

During the French Expedition at the end of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, the architects of Napoleon discovered a large brick-built Basilica near Armant, with apses at both ends. It is unique in Egypt, but several later examples occur in the West: St. Gall (822-829), and the cathedrals of Cologne (eighth - ninth century) and Hildesheim (851-872). The type was probably the result of the change in the orientation of churches to give them an eastern apse instead of the earlier western one.

In most Egyptian churches, no buttressing was found to be necessary for the apse, and the thickness of the wall was itself enough. In St. Menas, Maryût, however, there are three external buttresses, to meet the internal thrust.

Buttresses in various forms were adopted from early times in both East and West, to allow the walls to be built thinner, but it was the Romans who perfected the art, especially in the architecture of baths where the vaults exerted a good deal of thrust, and the grouping of the rooms together was not enough in itself. The latter system, however, is found in some of the larger Egyptian

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(2) Supra, pp. 31-2.
(3) Lethaby: Medieval Art, pp. 67, 92-4.
(4) Ibid., p. 49.
churches like the White and Red Monasteries and St. Simeon at Aswan, since the preference for rectangular buildings was always predominant in the country. It looks as if the church was planned from outside inwards: the outer straight walls were drawn first, the internal parts were arranged, apses, colonnade, narthex etc., and then the remaining gaps at the east end could be filled with rooms of various kinds, a stair-case or a library. The same thing can be said about those churches in Nubia, where a passage is found around the apse connecting the two side chambers\(^1\), although according to another theory, this was intended to separate the haikal from the external wall of the building and thus give it further protection from any possible attack from outside\(^2\). At any rate it differs from the similar passages which are common in Gothic cathedrals, and are designed to allow pilgrims and others to move easily round the apse.

**THE HAIKAL**

Early churches had only one haikal, and not three as claimed by Butler\(^3\), separated from the nave by a solid screen and connected with it through a triumphal arch supported on piers. The higab, or haikal screen, is usually extended in front of the side chapels in a straight line, but in rare cases like Abu Sargah, and also in Nubian churches, that part in front of the central haikal projects out into the choir, to allow for extra doors on the north and south. There are no examples existing of very early screens, but in the Middle Ages they were usually made of wood decorated with

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(1) Supra, p. 88.
(2) A. Badawy: L'Art Copte, p.9.
geometric designs and inlaid with ivory and gold, with a row of paintings at the top.

The floor of the haikal is usually a step above the level of the nave. Its arrangement has already been discussed in connection with one variety of churches: those with a trefoil sanctuary. Generally speaking, the altar is placed centrally, on a raised platform, covered by a canopy or baldachin, supported on four slender columns. It could be watched from the tribune, but there is plenty of room all round it to allow the priest to move freely. In the Church of Al Mo'allakah there is no division between the central haikal and the side ones, for the arches separating them are wide open and there are no walls at all, but in most of the churches in Old Cairo they communicate through doors. The haikal is usually connected directly with the side chambers or sacristies, as in Dair Abu Hennis and the Nubian churches. This part of the church always received most attention from the architects, thus it was heavily decorated with frescoes and sculptures, and when churches began to use domes for the roof, instead of wood, especially after the XII century, the best domes were those over the haikal, not the nave, like the byzantine churches.

One of the characteristic features of Egyptian churches is that the only sanctuaries are those at the east end, none are allowed anywhere in the body of the church, although that was not uncommon in the East. Sometimes, especially in the south, several churches are built beside each other (Nakada), but they are separate units, each complete with its haikal.

(1) Supra, p. 65.
THE CHOIR

In most of the early churches in Egypt, there is no indication as to the original arrangement of the choir, but it is certain that it differed from the ninth century choirs in the Monasteries of the Natrun Valley in that it was not separated from the nave by a solid wall pierced through by doors. The eastern end of the nave and aisles in the Monasteries near Sohag is raised a step above the floor of the nave and probably served as the choir. In Al Mo'allakah the floor continues at the same level right to the eastern wall, but there is a wooden screen of lattice work which is obviously of a late date. It may have, of course, replaced an earlier one. Since the sanctuary occupies the whole width of the church, the choir, too, does the same, and in that it is very different from Roman basilicas with their deep chancels.

In the Main Church at Saqqara, a low bench has been observed, in front of the higab. This probably corresponds to the solea in Greek churches, standing on which the deacon recites some of the litanies.

Attached to the choir from the west is the ambon. In the White and Red Monasteries, it is in the centre of the nave, following the arrangement of St. Menas, Maryût, but at Saqqara and in most of the Nubian churches it is placed beside one of the nave columns, usually on the north side.

THE BAPTISMAL FONT

The only baptistry with a separate building existing in

(2) Supra, p. 74.
(3) Hamilton: Byzantine Architecture and Decoration, p. 25.
Egypt is that of St. Menas, Maryût, but a baptismal font is usually found in the church itself. This does not have a fixed place: sometimes it is found in the narthex or in one of the rooms adjacent to it. In the White Monastery, the font occupies one of the chambers beside the apse\(^1\), a position very similar to present-day practice in Coptic churches.

THE MATRONEUM

Two methods were used to accommodate women in Egyptian churches, for it seems to have been always the custom to separate them from men. In some cases, like Al Mo'allakah\(^2\), they occupied the western part of the nave, sitting behind men with, perhaps, a light screen in between, and so, as the whole congregation faced east, there would have been no exchange of glances. That seems to have been the earlier system followed everywhere, but as the size of the congregation increased, the side aisles were constructed in two floors, so that the upper one could serve as a matroneum, or women's gallery. The galleries were continued over the narthex, and opened into the nave by large bays, the arches of which connected the columns or piers, with some sort of screen to hide the worshippers from the congregation below. Upper galleries are found in most of the Egyptian churches, approached by a stair to the north side of the narthex, usually. Outside Egypt they are found in some of the oriental basilicas from the fourth century onwards (the basilica at Tyre, St. John Studios), they are typical of centralized

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(1) Supra, p. 66.
(2) Also the church of El Malak at Dronka, south of Asyut; Somers Clarke: Christian Antiquities, pp. 175-6.
churches everywhere, except in Armenia¹ (SS. Sergius and Bacchus, San Vitale), and they are also found in domed basilicas like S. Sophia in Salonica, S. Irene in Constantinople, Khodja Kaleessi, and Church II in Cilicia Trachaea².

At a later period it seems that the galleries started to lose their importance, thus in Al Mo'allakah, they are confined to the top of the narthex, and a strange feature about them is that they are extended eastward and are allowed to project over the nave. When it became customary once more for women to sit in the nave, the galleries in some of the churches in Old Cairo, like Sitt Barbara, were turned to secular uses³, and the process was made easy by the fact that once the bays were filled up with solid walls instead of parapets, there was no connection between them and the body of the church, and they could be approached directly from outside. In Sitt Barbara, it seems that before they were turned to the priest's own use, the matronea had first been transformed into chapels, and Butler found many traces of paintings on their walls.

It is interesting to notice that in many Coptic churches nowadays, galleries are used only when the nave gets full, on some special occasions like Christmas or Easter, otherwise they are left unused and women have their division downstairs.

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¹ Strzygowski: Origin of Christian Church Art, p. 67.
² Strzygowski: Kleinasien, pp. 15 f.
THE NARTHEX

The narthex took different shapes in early Christian churches. In basilicas with an open colonnaded atrium in front of them, the eastern arcade of the atrium, that is the one adjoining the church, is incorporated in the building, to serve as a narthex. It is usually of the same width as the church, and rarely extends beyond its lateral walls. Several doors lead into the interior. This type is found in Rome in Old St. Peter's and St. John Lateran, and in Constantinople in St. John Studios ¹, though the latter has its peculiar structure.

In some of the Byzantine churches, the narthex became a means of enlarging the church towards the west, by leaving it open to the nave and aisles, as in St. Irene (c. 532 A.D.)², and the Church of the Virgin Pammakaristos, Constantinople (1315 A.D.)³. Sometimes there is actually another outer narthex.

The third variety is the closed narthex, also common in Byzantine architecture from an early time. It is found in the Church of the Nativity, at Bethlehem, constructed by Justinian⁴.

The latter type was the one adopted in Egyptian churches. It consists of a long hall, aligning the west front of the church, with one door in the centre of each of the longer walls (three in the Main Church at Saqqara and at Dendereh). There are two exceptions, the first is Al Mo'allakah, with its narthex colonnaded on the west (supra p.77), and the second is the Basilica near Dendereh, which has doors at the western end of the lateral walls opening into vestibules, before they lead to the narthex (supra, p. 67).

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(1) Lethaby: Medieval Art, p.33. (2) D. Talbot Rice: Byzantine Art, Fig.4, p.68. (3) Hamilton: Byzantine Architecture and Decoration Fig.27. (4) Crowfoot: Early Churches in Palestine, p.54.
The narthex rarely occupies the full width of the church, for its ends are usually cut off and taken by the staircase on one side, and a chamber on the other.

One of the most interesting features in the narthex of some Egyptian churches, is the apsidal ending. This is done by a semi-circle of columns carrying an architrave and covered by a half-dome. Open columnar exedrae of this type are a distinctive feature of Byzantine architecture, and are also familiar in the architecture of Roman baths and palaces from at least the second century A.D.; in the so-called temple of Minerva Medici, they date from the early fourth century. From the fifth century onwards a great number of churches have their square or rectangular nave ending in opposed open columnar exedrae. Beside S. Lorenzo, at Milan, and S. Vitale, at Ravenna, Ward Perkins has called attention to the existence of at least two examples outside Italy dating from the fifth century. The one is the church in the Stoa of Hadrian at Athens, and the other is the martyrion at Seleucia-Pieria, near Antioch. The greatest application of open columnar exedrae was, however, in Byzantine churches, such as SS. Sergius and Bacchus, and Hagia Sophia.

In all the previous examples, the exedrae have a definite structural function, but in Egypt the case is different. St. Menas has apses at both ends of the narthex, the White and probably the Red Monasteries have only one. They have a purely aesthetic value.

Although the narthex of Dair Abu Hennis does not have such

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(2) Swift: Roman Sources, p. 79; Ward Perkins: The Italian Element, n. 39.
(3) Ward Perkins, op. cit., Pl. V.
(4) Supra, p. 60.
an elaborate system, its southern wall has a deep apsidal recess, at one side, most probably as an ornament only.¹

The narthex was the place where catechumens and others, who had not yet been fully accepted to the membership of the church, retired during the service. It was also the place for discipline and admonition for penitents. At Abu Sargah, Dair Abu's Sifain, Al Adra Harat-az Zuailah and most churches in Cairo,² a large tank is found sunk in the floor of the narthex, and this custom may be the result of some early practice.

(1) Supra, p.70.
(2) Butler: Coptic Churches, vol. 1, pp. 16 f.
Sculpture was widely used for the decoration of the early churches of Egypt. In addition to the capitals, the shafts of the columns were often carved and the walls were elaborately decorated with continuous friezes at different places. A good deal of this sculpture has been revealed in excavations and is now scattered all over the museums of Egypt itself and elsewhere. Much has also been lost, for the remains of the Coptic period used to be regarded as the "dark age" in Egyptian archaeology, falling between the great wealth of the pharaonic art and the rich products of the Islamic period.

The importance of the decorative work of Christian Egypt before the Arab conquest has been more appreciated in recent years, and several archaeologists have made detailed studies of various aspects of it. Among them a few may be mentioned: Kitzinger, Duthuit,¹ and Morcy. Each of them took it from a certain angle. It is not intended in this chapter to deal with the wider issues of early Coptic art, but to confine the discussion to the architectural ornament of the churches.

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¹ G. Duthuit: *La sculpture copte*, Paris, 1930.
The difficulty which meets any student of early Coptic sculpture is not lack of material, for rich finds have been made at Oxyrhynchus, Ahnas, the Monasteries near Schag, and at Bawit and Saqqara, in addition to occasional discoveries in scattered places particularly in and around Alexandria. The real difficulty is that of exact dating, since in most cases the sites themselves are not accurately dated and the sculptures are of a mixed type and clearly extend over a long period. Thus while the White Monastery itself was founded about the middle of the fifth century (p. 59 supra), none of the sculptures discovered there can be attributed with certainty to this early period, for the original ornament was replaced at some subsequent time. The capitals of the nave columns, for example, do not fit well on the shafts and, in style, some of them seem to belong to an earlier period than the building so that they must have been looted from some pagan temple in the neighbourhood, and used in the church during reconstruction. The friezes of the main apse are made up of bits, not all of the same type, and moreover most of the

(3) Monneret de Villard: Les Couvents près de Schag, vol. II.
(4) E. Chassinet: Fouilles à Baouit, Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut Francais d'Archeologie orientale du Caire, tome XIII, Cairo, 1911.
(5) Quibell: Excavations at Saqqara, see Bibliography.
(6) E. Kitzinger: notes on Early Coptic Sculpture, Archaeologia, vol. LXXXVII, 1938, p. 191 n. 4; Monneret de Villard, op. cit., pp. 125-6
pieces do not exactly fit in the curve of the apse. The same thing can be said about Saqqara, where at any rate, the churches are not very accurately dated by the excavators.

In a paper on early Coptic sculpture, Kitzinger\(^1\), therefore, decided to fix his dates on stylistic grounds. He chose for his basic study the important sculptures discovered by Naville at Ahnas\(^2\), the ancient Heracleopolis. These fall in two groups: the earlier 'soft' group, in which the figures are more fleshy and the classical elements occur frequently, and the later 'hard' group with sharply cut forms, emphasized contrast of light and shadow and more rigidly stylized figures, very different from the first, though obviously derived from it. In other words it is the result of a continuous development in style of the 'soft' group. The approximate dates of these two are the end of the fourth century and the middle of the fifth, respectively. From this fixed point, the other finds of sculptures can be dated by comparison. Oxyrhynchus is more classical in subject-matter, and softer in treatment, and therefore earlier, dating from the fourth century. The monasteries in the south belong to a period from the fifth century onwards, and the native spirit in them is clearer than in other cases.

The sculptures will be divided into three main types: capitals, friezes and finally niches and pediments.

CAPITALS

The Corinthian capital was the type from which most of the Christian ones were descended. In classical times the acanthus leaves were set in tiers covering the body of the capital but not overcrowding it. The lower tier stems from the bottom, behind it

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at a higher level stems another one, and then at the top, acanthus leaves support the corner volutes. During the first centuries A.D. a long process of development took place: the acanthus was never abandoned, but it received a varied treatment which completely transformed its appearance. The leaves in the lower part are elongated and occupy more space, so that those above them are pushed further up till they eventually cover part of the volutes. The inner volutes become less important and are sometimes omitted. At the same time, the leaves become less natural-looking, they lose much of their softness, their tips become thorny, and on the whole they lack the plastic treatment of classical times. In the last phase, the foliage becomes a kind of abstract design almost deprived of plastic value.

This evolution, caused by changes in taste and appreciation, was general all over the East, though perhaps it is easier to study it in Palestine and Constantinople, where more examples are found, some closely dated. The earliest belong to the latter part of the fourth century, and by the middle of the fifth century the capitals had been radically transformed. The Egyptian capitals had their own peculiarities which appear first at Oxyrhynchus at about 390 and can be traced through the capitals of Ahnas, till we reach the still further developed ones of Bawit and Saqqara. A comparison between the two capitals illustrated by Kitzinger (Pl. LXVIII, 1 and 4), one from Oxyrhynchus and the other from Ahnas, will show the gradual process of transformation. The first still has the volutes, and the soft natural foliage, while in the second the volutes are

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(3) Chassinat, op. cit., pls. 17-19, 34, 45.
(4) Quibell: Excavations at Saqqara, 1907-8, pls. 28, 30, 32; ibid., 1908, 1909, 1910, pls. 33, 34, 36.
almost hidden by the sheath leaves, which also look spiky with lobes spread out like a fan.

One of the features which characterise Egyptian capitals, and which appear as early as the Ahnas capitals, dating from about the middle of the fifth century, is that the upper leaves are so widely spaced as to show behind them the caulicoli and sheath-leaves, the junction of which is emphasised by large round knobs. Though this feature originally started outside Egypt, it was there that it lingered on, even when it was dropped out elsewhere.

Sixth century capitals go a step further in their development, though their connection with the earlier ones from Egypt itself is always apparent. The foliage is even stiffer, and more conventionalised than before. In many cases it is so thin that the body of the capitals appears underneath it. The leaves are sharply cut, with great emphasis on the contrast between light and shadow and the effects resulting from it. They are artificially arranged so as to form a rigid pattern. In many cases the volutes have disappeared, or are completely fused with the sheath-leaves, to form a semi-abstract pattern.

In addition to the Corinthian capital, several of the so-called 'basket capitals' were recovered from the sites of Bawit and Saqqara. This is one of the types which were widely used in the time of Justinian, and it is often assumed that they were exported in a nearly finished state from a common centre, most likely the Imperial quarries of Proconnesus. Instead of the acanthus foliage, they are covered with interlacing basket-work. They are found in

(1) Kitzinger, op. cit., p.187.
(2) A large number of these is illustrated by Drioton, op.cit., pp.64 f.
(3) The name 'basket-capital' is used by some writers to indicate a capital of basket shape, see Dalton: Byzantine Art and Archaeology, p.176.
Constantinople and in most provinces of the Empire, and seem to have enjoyed great popularity in the sixth century.

Before leaving this point reference must be made to the capitals found on the site of St. Menas, Maryut, and removed by Kaufmann to Frankfurt. They all belong to the fourth and fifth centuries, and none are later than that, so really there is nothing contemporary with the later stages in the development of the Corinthian capital in the upper country. At any rate they do not show anything of that hardening and stylisation noticed in the southern monasteries, and their classicism is more maintained.

Several Ionic and composite Ionic capitals were also found at St. Menas and in the soil of Alexandria itself, though they are not represented in the hinterland. They are of small dimensions. Both types were commonly used in the Byzantine period from about the fifth century and, with several modifications and adjustments, had a long life\(^1\), over a very wide area.

**FRIEZES**

The same tendencies observed in the development of the acanthus capital, are clear from a study of the friezes. The earlier friezes from Oxyrhynchus are softer and more natural in their treatment, then follows the 'hard' style of about the middle of the fifth century, and further development towards rigidity and hardness takes place at Bawit and Saqqara.

Decorated friezes became far more frequent in Coptic churches than in earlier Greek or Roman temples, and they lost their architectural connection. Thus sculpture became purely decorative.

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(2) Dalton, op. cit., p.177.
Shafts of columns are often decorated, friezes are found over niches and door-ways, while free sculpture is very rare. Of the friezes found at Ahnas many have subjects taken from Greek mythology, Leda and the Swan being one of the most popular themes. These are executed in the same style, and might have been done by the same artists who worked on friezes with a definitely Christian symbol, a cross for example, for we must not underestimate the tenacity of paganism in Egypt, where old traditions always die hard. Until at least the fifth century the old religions had numerous adherents in Alexandria and in the hinterland, and the artists must have worked on the decoration of both churches and temples. It is difficult to believe that the same subjects were used for either, as it is sometimes suggested, or that pagan scenes would have been used to adorn churches. By the sixth century such scenes had disappeared and none of them is used at Bawit or Saqqara. It must be assumed that by then Christianity had established itself firmly in the country and was gradually driving out paganism altogether.

Among the friezes from Ahnas, many show human figures. These had not been common at Oxyrhynchus, and they almost disappear again in the sixth century. In all the collection from the Nilometer of Rodah, published by Drioton, none of the friezes (mostly sixth century) has human figures. They form, therefore, an isolated group that is not easy to account for. They are not simply the result of 'oriental' influence, for not only are most of the subjects taken from classical mythology, but in style they

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(2) P.21 supra.
(3) Kitzinger, op. cit., p.192.
are not outside the sphere of classical influence. They cannot be explained as a reaction of the native hinterland against the hellenism of Alexandria, by reverting to the old pharaonic style, for Coptic sculpture in general is removed from the ancient Egyptian as far as it can be. Again they may be related in many respects to the early Christian sculptures throughout the Mediterranean, but they are so peculiar that they stand alone and form their own group.

Coptic figure sculpture has been the subject of a good study by A. Westholm about twenty years ago. Sculptures earlier than the Ahnas group, and also having a strong local character mixed with a classical flavour, have been found in Egypt. The so-called Fayum terracottas are the best known among many figurines found on most Graeco-Roman sites. There are also the plaster mummy masks of the Roman period, and numerous ivory carvings attributed to Alexandria. Although they are not the only antecedents of the later Coptic style, Westholm has shown that they contain many of its characteristic features, such as the rigid frontal look with the typical 'Coptic smile', the pointed elliptical eye, the stylized head-dresses, and several others.

The outstanding thing about the Egyptian artist all through the ages, is his ability to absorb foreign elements and add them to his work after he had given them a strongly local appearance. Therefore his products always show something new and fresh. It is obvious that in the fifth century, the time of our Ahnas figure sculptures, Egypt was closely connected with, and

(3) Also cf. many illustrations by Duthuit: La sculpture copte, Pls. XXIII, XXVII, XXVIII, XXXII etc.
receiving much influence from Syria. A group comparable to the Egyptian one was found on the site of the Nabatean temple at Khirbet-et-Tannur. This shows mainly gods and goddesses, not unlike those of Palmyra. A Syrian element in some of the Ahnas sculptures is thus possible.

All this only proves the theory that Coptic work had a multiple origin, and though the early Christian art of the whole Mediterranean is strikingly homogeneous, Egypt stands out as a separate region occupying a place of its own.

While the human figure is rare on friezes, animals are not. Since at least the second century A.D., the practice of filling the acanthus volutes with half-length figures of animals was common in all regions. It is found at Oxyrhynchus, Ahnas and in the later period. The suggestion that such friezes with an animal element are of Oriental origin does not seem to have much substance in it, and in fact they belong to the common late antique repertoire.

The great majority of friezes have a foliage design which again can be traced from Oxyrhynchus, through Ahnas to the Monasteries of Bawit and Saqqara. The Coptic acanthus is of a highly stylized type, the branches form a rigid pattern of scrolls repeated again and again. Small triangular leaves (Wedelranken) are set symmetrically in rows on both sides of the branch, instead of the classical custom of putting them on one side only.

The interlacing foliage frieze was very common in Egypt in the fifth century, though its roots go back to Oxyrhynchus.

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(1) Kitzinger, op. cit., p.207.
(2) Cf. Kitzinger, op. cit., PL LXXI, 2, 3, 4, 5.
(3) Zaloscer, op. cit., introduction.
In the sixth century, the vine-scroll makes its appearance on a wide scale, and becomes one of the main themes at Baouit and Saqqara. It is far removed from the natural looking Greek work with real vine sprouting stems and bunches of grapes. Like other ornaments it was transformed into an abstract design.

The previous sculptures show the gradual dissolution of the classical style and the continuous infiltration of foreign elements, so that by the sixth century, Coptic sculpture becomes markedly distinct from the rest of the Mediterranean World, and rather occupies a place of its own.

At the same time there seems to have been another school in Egypt which remained closer to the classical tradition and which was probably patronised by the Greek community in the country and the better educated classes. Its works are not numerous, nevertheless they are very different from the products of the local schools, and they must have received inspiration from Alexandria itself. The most important of them is the door of St. Barbara, found buried within the walls during restoration work and now preserved in the Coptic Museum of Old Cairo.

The door is decorated on both sides, one side has human figures and architectural ornament, and the other a purely decorative design. The first side is divided into panels, the upper two of which are almost identical and show two flying angels, with arms stretched out carrying a garland within which is the bust of a man with short beard. Such a scene is very

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(1) Chassinat, op. cit., Pl.85; Quibell, 1907-8, p.34.
(2) Patricolo and Monneret de Villard: The Church of Sitt Barbara, pp.45 f.
On the doors of St. Barbara, behind the angels are two columns in the middle of which are attached open curtains. Then behind them are two standing figures: those on the left are holding books in their hands, while those of the right are probably making an offering of some sort.

The panels underneath are almost square in shape. On the left Christ is shown with a cruciform nimbus, and on the right a seated figure is in a shell-shaped niche, flanked by small columns. Then underneath again are two more rectangular panels, which probably occupied the middle of the door, though it is hard to say as the bottom part has rotted away. On the left is perhaps a representation of the Ascension, with Christ in a mandorla, surrounded by six figures on each side of Him, but again these are badly preserved so that it is difficult to recognise the attitudes of the various figures. On the whole the drapery is softly treated and the bodies are full and rounded.

The other side of the door is also divided into panels, and decorated with vine branches and bunches of grapes, without any figures. It looks rich and natural. The vine

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(1) Patricolo & Monneret de Villard, op. cit., p.49.
(2) Ibid., p.50.
ornament was at any rate of common frequency in Coptic friezes from the early period.

From the style of the carving, the door can hardly be as early as fourth century, the date suggested by Monneret de Villard. It is more likely a fifth century work, using some of the scenes commonly used then.

PEDIMENTS AND NICHES

The use of decorative niches goes back to pre-Christian times. They appear frequently in Hellenistic and in Roman Imperial architecture, to break up the straight walls of the interior. In Christian Churches too they were used everywhere, so that they are not confined to any one particular place. In Coptic Egypt they had a strong tenacity and continued to be used throughout the centuries, sometimes taking peculiar shapes. They are found either in the walls or in the apses of the sanctuary.

Coptic niches can be divided into two varieties. The first is a simple conch, with or without a shell inside. When the shell appears it usually has a hinge at the bottom, with the fluting radiating upwards from it. Sometimes there is also an eagle or a cross in the centre, surrounded by a garland. The arch of the niche is usually decorated with an acanthus or a vine frieze. Several examples have been found at Denderah, at Luxor and elsewhere.

The second variety is of more complicated shape, for it is flanked by half pilasters or columns carrying a pediment of broken outline, so that it has three heads instead of one, but the interior is not very different from the first group. Most of the niches in the White and Red Monasteries are of this type, and it is also found at Ahnas, Ashmunein and other places\(^1\). The type is traced back ultimately to the classical pediment, but it has been developed to such an extent that it becomes almost completely different. At Baalbeck, where many pediments are found, the outline is only slightly broken. In Egypt, on the other hand, the lower cornice is often omitted, and the central part of the upper one usually becomes circular, instead of triangular, following the outline of the conch. In some cases it seems to have lost its meaning, to become a mere frame to the ornament in it. This is another example of the ability of Egyptian artists to transform foreign elements and to give them their own interpretation.

\(^{1}\) Ibid., Figs. 173, 188, 193, 212.
CONCLUSION

The architectural decoration of the early Egyptian churches confirms the conclusions arrived at from the study of architecture, namely that there were two schools at work in the period before the Arab conquest, one in Alexandria and the other in the hinterland. They exercised a certain amount of influence on each other, but generally speaking they remained distinct. The first was based on a strong hellenistic background and was patronised by people brought up in a highly cultural atmosphere. At the same time it received much impetus from its close connections with the outer world, both East and West. The second, though it is not a continuation of the ancient art, had a strong native character. In sculpture in particular the Hellenistic element was powerful, and naturally it received much from Alexandria. Eventually it had the upper hand in the country, and became the predominant one.

This art can best be described as Coptic, for though theologians and some art historians may hesitate to apply the term to the period prior to the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) and the separation of the Alexandrian Church from the main body of the Church, literally, it merely means Egyptian. Therefore it properly applied to the period during which the country was
predominantly Christian, and to its artistic productions, for indeed there is no valid way to divide these products into Christian, pagan and secular, especially in the first centuries, and even as late as the fifth century.

It is not easy to choose the medium to determine the distinctive elements of the Coptic style, but it would appear that architecture is the best. There, some dates can be securely fixed, and though they are few and scattered, they are important landmarks throughout the whole period. In sculpture and painting, on the other hand, we have often got to rely on stylistic comparisons which can be very dangerous.

Nevertheless the architectural remains are not enough by themselves, and many gaps can be filled from an examination of the other artistic media. The historical background also helps to explain the process of development.

The sources from which this art emerged, and the motifs that invaded it throughout the centuries are numerous. They are first to be sought in Egypt itself, where the native artists played their full share in producing new ideas and in assimilating foreign ones. We should not underestimate the tenacity of ancient traditions in a strongly conservative country like Egypt. In some cases the ancient style was copied with a certain amount of success (White Monastery). Some elements also found their way from Rome, Byzantium, Syria and from the Orient, but in estimating these great care must be taken, for often the similarity between Coptic art and early Christian art elsewhere is merely due to the artists working under similar conditions and for the same purpose.
So while Egypt was, during our period, part of the Byzantine Empire, its church stands apart from the others, and its art forms a distinct school.
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