

COPTIC CHURCHES IN OLD CAIRO, AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL, ARCHITECTURAL AND ARTISTIC STUDY

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Abstract

The churches of ancient Egypt received continuous care during the Islamic era. They were damaged when Fustat burned and were renovated during the reign of Harun al-Rashid al-'Abbasi and Al-'Aziz Billah the Fatimid. They number ten churches with a rectangular and square plan. These churches include the Hanging Church, the Church of Abu Serja, the Church of Saint Barbara, the Church of Caesarea al-Rayhan, and the Church of Abu Seifin, the Church of Anba Shenouda, the Church of the Virgin of Damsheria, the Church of Babylon Al-Daraj, the Church of Aba Kiir and John, and the Church of Prince Tadros Al-Mashriqi.

Some of these churches take a rectangular plan consisting of the façade, the transverse entrance vestibule, and the longitudinal porticoes and structures, as in the Hanging Church, the Church of Abu Serja, Barbara, Abu Seifin, Anba Shenouda, and the Babylon Staircase. Others take a square plan, as in the Church of Caesarea Al-Rayhan and the Church of Prince Tadros Al-Mashriqi.

The research deals with the planning of Coptic churches and an archaeological, architectural and artistic study of four churches in ancient Egypt, including: the Hanging Church, the Church of Abu Serja, Barbara, and Abu Seifin.

Keywords: ancient Egypt, Coptic churches, the Islamic era, the Hanging Church, the Church of Abu Serja, the Church of Saint Barbara, the Church of Abu Seifin Church.

Frist: Planning of Coptic churches

Church (church) is a Syriac word “knoshto” which means a group, and in Hebrew “ecclesiastical” meaning a council or assembly, and in Greek and Coptic “ecclesia” the New Testament (ecclesia)) from the verb (ecalco) meaning to invite any place of general convocation, where Greek meetings were held. Or judicial or seminars, and the Christian

Church has several names, including the House of Prayer, the House of Martyrs, the House of Community, the House of Allegiance, the Community of Believers, and the House of Angels. Churches are also named after the names of saints, martyrs, and angels, to commemorate the saints and to commemorate the memory of the martyrs.

References mentioned that church planning is generally limited¹ to three main styles²: Basilica planning, Byzantine planning³, and Coptic planning (the Egyptian Church)⁴. We find that there are general features that combine all of these styles, even if each of them has its own unique features. In fact, the Egyptian Church has its elements were taken from the Basilica and Byzantine styles, as we hardly find a single Egyptian church that was limited to one specific style, but rather combined two or three styles in most cases. Therefore, we will briefly present each style separately so that the specific style of the Egyptian church becomes clear⁵.

The church layout is generally divided into three main types: Basilica layout, Byzantine layout, and Coptic layout. Although there are general characteristics that combine these three layouts, each layout has special characteristics that are unique to it.

Although the Coptic Church took its architectural elements from the Basilica and Byzantine planning, there is hardly a single Coptic church that was limited to one of them, but in most cases it combined the two plans. The layout of Coptic churches is a mixed layout that combines the Basilica layout (a rectangular building) and the Byzantine layout⁶ (a square-

¹ Butler, Alfred (2012). *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt*, 1, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Authority, pp. 11:13.

² Shiha, Mustafa (1988). *Studies in Coptic Architecture and Arts*, Cairo, p. 57.

³ Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. Architectural planning of byzantine churches and their decorative and applied elements, *International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR)*, Vol. 7 Issue 6, June 2023, pp. 238-252.

⁴ For details, See: Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. The origins of the square layout of Coptic churches in light of the Virgin Church in Qusia and Abanoub in Samannoud, *History and Future Magazine*, History Department, Faculty of Arts, Minya University, Special Issues Series, July 2000. Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. Tripartite architectural planning and architectural elements in Islamic and Coptic buildings in the Fatimid era, *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Minya University*, 49, July 2003.

⁵ See: Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed (2023). *Architecture of Coptic Churches in the Fatimid Era*, Noor Publishing, London: U.K. Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed (2023). *A History of Coptic Architecture*, Noor Publishing, London: U.K.

⁶ Shiha, Mustafa (1988). *Studies in Coptic Architecture and Arts*, p. 57.

shaped building). The truth is that there are no Coptic churches with a pure Basilica layout or a pure Byzantine layout, but most of them represent a mixed layout that combines harmonious architectural elements from each plan¹.

However, some believe that the planning of Coptic churches is a plan that is essentially based on basilica planning, which is what is found in the planning of most Coptic churches. Because purely Byzantine planning was not found in the churches of Egypt, which are characterized by the presence of full domes above the structures, they tend towards the east with three structures with full domes and not half domes².

1. Basilica planning “Royal style“

Its name is derived from the word Basilica, which is a Latin word taken from the Greek word Basilica, in reference to King Basilios, meaning that the word Basilica means royal.

Therefore, the basilica in Greek architecture indicates lineage or subordination to the king more than form or function. As for the Romans, they had borrowed from the Greeks the word Basilica, but the basilica in Roman architecture was no longer limited to lineage or subordination to the king because it was linked to Roman civil architecture in general. It described an architectural form that spread in Roman civil architecture with multiple functional uses.

We find that the courthouse (the court) in the main square of the Roman city, “Forum,” the market (as a headquarters for major merchants) in the main square of the Roman city, “Forum,” and the main reception hall in Roman houses and palaces took the same layout as the basilica, which was used for multiple functional purposes, such as : Courthouse, market, residential.

Thus, the Roman basilica can be defined as an architectural form in general, as it represented a gathering hall or gathering of a large audience for a purpose other than worship, which is the common function in all functional uses. The basilica appeared and was known in Roman cities since the first century AD, and continued for four centuries as an architectural plan that could be developed and modified according to renewable uses. It did not have a fixed, typical architectural form, but rather took different architectural forms. The most common architectural form of the Roman basilica building originally consisted of a rectangular hall (space) extending along the longitudinal axis,

¹Butler, Alfred (2012). *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt*, 1, pp. 23-24.

²Butler, Alfred (2012). *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt*, 1, p. 25.

divided by two rows of columns into 3 wings, and ending with a large apse (apse) in the middle of the wall on the eastern side, in which the Judicial Council or the Judicial Council or Top traders was held¹.

On this basis, most researchers in the field of Christian architecture generally agree to consider that the Roman basilica is the direct source of the basilica planning of the church, as the early Christians had no choice but to acquire ancient buildings of any type to convert them into churches, so that the basilica planning church became composed of a simple rectangular building consisting of three longitudinal wings from the inside, the widest and tallest of which is the middle wing, which is separated from the two side wings by two rows of columns. On the eastern side, the main church apse is located in the form of a semicircle most of the time.

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This confirms what was mentioned by Alfred Butler, who believes that the planning of the basilica church began with a simple rectangular hall devoid of wings, ending on the eastern side with a small room (the temple), with a small cavity in the middle of its eastern side, which he called the church apse, two side wings were later added to this simple plan³.

What is meant by this plan is a rectangular church with a nave divided into three aisles, the widest and highest of which is the middle aisle. Its frames and nave are covered with trusses made of wood, pottery, or brick.

This style is considered the oldest architectural style that has spread throughout the world, although there are many opinions about its basic source. Some of them trace its origins to the types of ancient Roman buildings, which are represented by the Roman

¹Shiha, Mustafa (1988). *Studies in Coptic Architecture and Arts*, p. 58.

²Shiha, Mustafa (1988). *Studies in Coptic Architecture and Arts*, p. 58.

³Butler, Alfred (2012). *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt*, 1, p. 20.

Square of Justice, where the Roman court was held, in addition to being considered a place for conducting commercial business. This building consists of a rectangular courtyard divided by two rows of pavilions into three corridors, the middle of which is the widest and is called the Great Gallery. In the middle of the wall on the eastern side is a cavity (apse), in which the judicial council or the council of major merchants was held¹.

Those who hold this opinion believe that Christians have transformed some ancient Roman buildings into churches, so that the basilica church has become a rectangular building with its entrance on the eastern side. The interior of the church consists of three vertical porticoes, the widest and tallest of which is the middle portico, while the two side porticoes are separated by two rows of baptisms. The eastern side is the main apse of the church (or its niche), which is in a semicircular shape most of the time. A chair for the bishop was placed in the apse, and on either side of it there is a marble amphitheater for the rest of the clergy. While the apse (mihrab) faces the western side of the building on the same axis as the apse, the main door of the church².

Although these researchers agreed to return the basic source of the basilica to ancient Roman buildings, they did not agree on the first place where a church of this style was built. Some attribute it to the city of Rome and others to Alexandria and Babylon. However, the first source from which the basilica church derived its layout was the hall, the huge columns in the ancient Egyptian temple in the Pharaonic era, especially since this architectural plan appeared since the Old Kingdom in the Valley Temple of King Khafre.

It is most likely that the basilica planning was its primary source in the ancient Egyptian temple, and then it spread from Egypt to all parts of the Christian world. The three porticoes are present in the temple, even if the religious content differed between them in terms of use. Indeed, many of the secondary architectural elements were found in common between the temple and the church. Such as purification basins, in addition to the fact that many of the ancient pagan temples in Egypt were converted into Christian churches after Christianity became the official religion of Egypt at the end of the 4th century AD. The pagan images were painted with a layer of mortar and crosses and other symbols of Christianity were engraved and engraved in their place. Parts of the temple were used for Christian religious purposes.

¹ Butler, Alfred (2012). *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt*, 1, p. 25.

² Shiha, Mustafa (1988). *Studies in Coptic Architecture and Arts*, p. 58.



The previous layout, as mentioned, was called a basilica, although the word is derived from the building that includes the “basil,” meaning the chair or bench that is placed inside a semicircular apse and on which the cleric or one of the pioneers of literature sits to deliver sermons, religious or political speeches, or poetry. The basilica is a building with a function. This name was not given to basilicas with a rectangular plan, but it was also given to basilicas with a square plan, as is the case in the square-planned Basilica of Constantine, whose roof is based on four pillars.

2. Byzantine planning

Its name was derived from the name of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine state, and it spread rapidly inside and outside the borders of the Byzantine state, which reached the height of its greatness in the 6th century AD.

The layout of the Byzantine church is completely different from the layout of the basilica church. The most prominent manifestation of this difference is that the layout of the Byzantine church is square in shape, while the layout of the basilica church is rectangular in shape. Byzantine churches are also characterized by the use of domes to cover many of their areas, especially the use of the high-rise central dome, which has the main role in covering the main space in the Byzantine church, in addition to the use of semi-domes, small domes, and various vaults, while we find that the means of covering in the basilica church was using flat or flat roofs and truss-shaped roofs.

The method of covering the Byzantine church with domed ceilings resulted in the square wing replacing the rectangular wing in the basilica church, and on each side of the square there was a short corridor covered by a vault. Thus, the surface of the church became in the shape of a cross, so that the view in the Byzantine church was directed directly towards the domes, instead of directing the gaze into the basilica church towards the main apse (Apse).

The Byzantine plan is distinguished by the fact that it has domes and columns, and it is considered one of the architectural styles that has gained great spread in the Christian world. Scholars consider it the preferred building that suits the construction of the Christian church. This plan derived its name from the name of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine state and spread rapidly inside and outside the borders of the state¹. This layout is square instead of rectangular like the Basilica layout, and it also relies on covering with domes, semi-domes, and vaults instead of the flat and gabled wooden roofs in the Basilica

¹Shiha, Mustafa (1988). Studies in Coptic Architecture and Arts, p. 61.

style.

By adopting the square shape of these churches in planning and covering them with domes, the square iwan replaced the rectangular wing, which was the dominant plan of any of the ancient basilicas, and on the sides of the square there was a short corridor covered by a vault. Thus, the surface of the church became in the shape of a cross, so that the view in the Byzantine church was directed directly towards the domes. Instead of the basilica church heading towards the main apse (Apse), thus the churches of this style took the shape of the cross as a pattern for their overall planning¹.

Regarding the origin of the dome above the square, scholars have attributed it to an Eastern origin, since the idea of the dome, which was based on India, reached Egypt easier than it did to the distant West. Given that Egypt is the closest to the cradle of the Christian religion and that its church was founded by Saint Mark, there is it is possible that Alexandria preceded the countries of the world in building the church².

There are those who believe that the dome was known in ancient Egyptian civilization before it was known in the Byzantine style or other architectural styles, as the tomb of Seneb, west of the Great Pyramid, is preceded by a square building made of mud, surmounted by a dome, which is the oldest known dome in Egypt.

As for the vault, which was widely used in the Byzantine style, it was known in ancient Egyptian architecture during the Old Kingdom, where we find it in the burial chamber of the Step Pyramid of Djoser.

Perhaps one of the most prominent features of the Byzantine Church in general is the frequent use of its internal and external decorations, especially those executed in mosaics and marble, and derived from Christian religious themes taken from Biblical stories. There are many examples outside Egypt, the most important of which is the Church³ of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which contains all the features and special features of this Byzantine plan, as its plan is square in shape with the cross in the middle, surrounded by four aisles on the four sides, and the central area is covered by a towering dome resting on semi-domes on the eastern and western sides, covering all.

¹Al-Bakhshawanji, , Ashraf Sayed (1995). *The Archaeological Churches of Mallawi* (an archaeological and architectural study), Cairo: Dar Nahdet al-Sharq, p. 205.

² Butler, Alfred (2012). *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt*, 1, pp. 22-23.

³ Al-Bakhshawanji, , Ashraf Sayed (1995). *The Archaeological Churches of Mallawi*, p. 205.

From the eastern and western iwans, this dome is based on its northern and southern sides on intersecting vaults that also cover the area of the two iwans. Examples of this layout inside Egypt are represented by the church that was discovered in Helwan, which consists of four wings that form a cross around the middle square covered by a low dome. There is also another church. It has a cruciform layout in ancient Dongola, Nubia, and dates back to (809 AD).

However, we cannot call this type of square layout the Byzantine layout, as it cannot be attributed to the Byzantine state at that time, as the first Egyptian churches began to be built in the early fourth century. We also attribute the layout of churches to the ancient Egyptian temples, where this layout was found. It is represented by the square whose roof rests on four columns or supports since the Old Kingdom era in a large number of Egyptian temples and tombs.

The layout of churches in the Byzantine Empire is characterized by the fact that it has domes and columns, and it is considered one of the architectural styles that gained great spread in the Christian world. Scholars consider it the preferred building that suits the construction of the Christian church, as it spread quickly inside and outside the borders of the state. This layout forms a square and also relies on covering with domes. And its halves and domes, and on the sides of the square there was a short corridor covered by a vault, and thus the surface of the church became in the shape of a cross, so that the view in the Byzantine church directed directly towards the domes, and thus the churches of this style took the shape of the cross as a pattern for their overall planning¹.

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Byzantine art reached its greatest prosperity in the church of Hagia Sophia, which was built during the reign of Emperor Justinian and whose opening was celebrated in the year (537 AD), and in which all the special features and features of this Byzantine layout are represented, as its layout is square in shape with the cross in the middle and surrounded by four iwans on the four sides. The central area is covered by a tall dome that rests on semi-domes on the eastern and western sides, covering both the eastern and western iwans. This dome, on its northern and southern sides, is also supported by intersecting vaults that also cover the area of the two iwans.

However, Byzantium's experimentation with the domes and vaults that characterized their style was not only the result of structural reasons¹, but it was also the result of symbolic ideas that were more important than architectural trends. Since the dome in the Eastern countries symbolized the sky, the people of Byzantium adopted this symbol when they made the church a miniature universe covering the dome. The large middle portico symbolizes the sky and has the image of Christ in the middle, despite the unity of style or design in the architecture of the early Christian era in Byzantium and Rome, a style that was derived directly from the design of the Roman basilica.

However, the architecture of the first Christian era began to develop with time until traces of the difference in thought appeared in this architecture. While the West continued the Roman trend of applying the basilica design to churches, Byzantium began to use the introduction of Eastern methods and elements, the most important of which is the use of domes and vaults in roofing square and polygonal rooms such as halls, and octagonal spaces.

Whatever the case, the layout of Byzantine buildings, especially in the first centuries of the life of the Byzantine state and its colonies, did not differ from that in Italy and its colonies in the early Christian era. The layout of the basilica remained used to build Byzantine churches since the 5th century AD.

¹ Atta, Zubaida Muhammad (1982). *Minya Province in the Byzantine Era in Light of the Papyrus Papers*, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Authority, pp. 124-132.

In addition to the basilica model with a rectangular shape, the use of square, polygonal, and circular niches of Roman origin spread in the Byzantine era, especially in Constantinople (Figs. 10-11), Asia Minor, and the Levant regions. These models were used for religious buildings known as baptisteries and were also used for tombs. A third model appeared for church ceilings, which is the cruciform plan, which consists of two intersecting rectangles that are always equal in width and in most cases in length, and from their intersection results a middle square that is always covered by a dome. Sometimes a dome rises above each arm, so the number of domes becomes five, in the event that the arms are close to square in position.

One of the most important features of Byzantine architecture is the use of domes, their halves, and longitudinal and intersecting vaults. In all cases, a main dome was placed over the central part of the site, whether it was composed of a rectangle, a cross, or a regular geometric polygon shape. This dome was surrounded by secondary domes or by semi-domes placed above other units of the site surrounding the central part on which the importance of the site and the facades is based.

The importance of the eastern niches increased, and the size of some of them increased to a noticeable degree and was covered with semi-domes. From the outside, the domes appear in the form of shallow bowls, to the point that they appear to be a complete hemisphere from the inside. The dome is surrounded from the outside by a vertical circular band of low height that ends at the top with a prominent eaves. This cylindrical band of low height was like a false neck with windows for lighting above it, the remaining visible part, from the dome.

Sometimes the domes were covered from the outside with pyramidal trusses, making them invisible in their spherical shape except from the inside only.

The use of spherical triangles spread due to the expansion in the use of domes and their halves since the fourth century, and was a transition from square areas to round areas on which the lower edges of the domes rest.

3. Coptic planning

In fact, the layout of the Coptic Church is essentially based on the basilica layout, in addition to the square layout that is widespread in the churches of Upper Egypt, which is found in the layout of most Coptic churches. By the end of the 4th century AD, the creation of unified shapes for buildings specifically designed for the purposes of Christian

worship began. The old buildings are no longer sufficient to accommodate the increasing numbers of worshipers, and there is now an urgent need or necessity to erect more spacious church buildings on larger areas.

For this reason, we find that the first Christians turned to the simple rectangular basilica hall in Roman buildings and took it as a basis for basic planning work, considering it an architectural form capable of containing the largest possible number of worshipers¹.

Perhaps the architectural change that occurred in the core of the basilica plan at the eastern end of the church body is the most important feature that distinguishes the Coptic Church. This change is represented in the uniqueness of the Coptic Church in the presence of several temples at the eastern end of the church body, the number of which varies, although there are usually three temples in the church building, while sometimes there are five temples and rarely seven temples, and this number may increase on rare occasions.

Also, each of these structures has fixed architectural elements: such as the presence of a small apse in the middle of the eastern side of the structure, and the protrusion of this apse does not appear from outside the eastern wall, and sometimes there is a corridor (the braid) located behind the main apse, connecting the three structures, In most cases, in the early planning of the Coptic Church, this apse is preceded by a marble amphitheater, preceded by the altar of the temple. These structures are often covered with domes, and the church structures on the eastern side are separated from the main body of the church on the western side by means of wooden screens known as the iconostasis (icon holder), one of the most accurate characteristics of the Coptic Church.

The temples² in all Coptic churches are the most sacred place in the church building³, and therefore the temple is called the Great Holy of Holies and the House of God. The temples

¹Walters, K. K. (2005). *Ancient Monasteries in Egypt*, translated by Ibrahim Salama, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Authority, p. 54.

²Shiha, Mustafa. *Studies in Coptic Architecture and Arts*, p. 65.

³The temples were found in churches towards the east and the temple is called the Holy of Holies. The Egyptian church contained one temple, which became three in the Fatimid era by expanding the two side rooms. The credit for this was due to the churches in Syria, Armenia, Anatolia and Asia Minor, which had moved to it from Iraq. See:

Harrison, R. M. (1963). *Churches and vhapels of central Asia*, *Anatolian syudies*, 13, p. 117. Settis, S. (1975). *Per L'interpretazion ji piazza Armenia*, *Mélanges d'archéologie et de L'école française de Rome*, 87, pp. 873:944. Grossmann, *Sanctuary*, the Coptic encyclopedia, 1, pp. 220.

occupy the eastern side of the church building and are in the form of a row extending the entire width of the church. The most important of them is the middle temple. The middle temple faces the middle hallway where the main mass is held, especially On Sundays and holidays.

The doors of the three temples were closed with curtains, and it is said that King Constantine I was the first to make a large curtain that closed the doors of the veil in the church that he built in Constantinople. It is noted that the number of temples in a church is always linked to the number of its porticoes, so it increases with the number of porticoes in the church. The early church was at the beginning, it contained one temple, but later it was multiplied to increase the worshipers. On both sides of the temple, there were two rooms¹.

These two rooms were called (pastophorium), which is the name of the small side room in ancient temples and the dwelling places of monks. The room of the Diaconicum (diaconicum) and Bethlehem (Agape) were in the east of the church on both sides of the structure, and the southern room was used for the provisions of the diaconian (meaning the deacon), and it was special for placing The clothes of the deacons and priests, their liturgical books, and what also belongs to them, and the placement of the tools “service utensils” that are used during the Mass and are lifted from the altar after its end for the deacons to sit to take gifts, receive donation money for the poor, and distribute in-kind and financial alms to the needy. The north was used to prepare rituals (prothesis) and sacred tables (agape), which means Bethlehem or the House of Bread, and was specifically for making the sacrifice, referring to the city of Bethlehem in which Jesus Christ was born. These two rooms, which were used as structures, are connected to the main structure in the courtyard or choir through arched openings or doors, just as they are connected to the main structure in other cases.

Since the ritual of the Christian Church forbids holding a mass in the church structure more than once a day, they tended to erect side structures in the two side rooms of the only temple. Multiple structures appeared at the end of the Fatimid era and at the beginning of

¹ Marrou, H. I. (1940). *L'origine orientale des diaconales remeines*, Melanjes Archéologie, 57, pp.95:142.
Hopfiner, T. (1949). *Pastophorai*, Real encyclopedie classischen a ilerumswissenschaft, 18, 2107-2109.
Schneider, A. M. (1949). *Liteugie und kirchen in syrien*, Nachrichten der Akademie der wissenschaften in Göttingen, pp.45-68. Descoedres, j. (1983). *Diepastophorien im Syro-byzantinischenosten*, pp.130-132. Grossmann, T., *Architectural elements of churches*, Diaconicon, the Coptic Encyclopedia, 1. p.209.

the Mamluk era, and the shapes of structures in Coptic churches varied, including half Circular, those that go beyond a semicircle, those with three corners, and those that are square and rectangular as well. The structures were either connected to each other or completely separate¹.

Perhaps one of the most important examples that attest to the splendor and beauty of this plan are the remains of the Mary Mina Church in the Western Desert, which was discovered by Coleman in 1905 and is considered one of the oldest Egyptian churches⁹. The church may be in the shape of a cross, as in the Byzantine system, but this is not known in Coptic church architecture, or it may be in the shape of a circle, which is rare in the Coptic Church.

In its architectural planning, the Coptic Church was influenced by ancient Egyptian temples. In building their ancient churches and monasteries², the Copts also preserved the characteristics that distinguished Pharaonic architecture in the temple, including the thickness of the walls, the lack of openings and windows, and the symbols of decoration visible on the windows covered with stained glass, so that the church has the dim light that arouses reverence and awe.

The thickness of the walls in ancient Egyptian temples, as well as in Coptic churches and monasteries, has its own wisdom and philosophy. It is an appropriate means for air conditioning in summer and winter, in addition to protecting buildings from erosion, winds, tornadoes, and hurricanes that destroy or damage the safety of buildings.

Coptic planning derived its features from the foundations of Basilica and Byzantine planning as well, as it derived from Basilica planning the elongation of its external lines, and it also derived from Byzantine planning the frequent use of domes, so we now see a rectangular church with a nave covered with nine domes, or less or more than this number. As for the credit that is attributed to the architecture The Coptic is the structure where the middle portico of the church, whether in a rectangular or square layout, is topped by a square room representing the structure, and two rooms were added on either side of it, which now represents three structures covered with three domes. These three structures are

¹ Al-Bakhshawanji, , Ashraf Sayed. Mallawi Archaeological Churches, p. 224.

² Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. The architectural elements and the features of urban planning of the desert Coptic monasteries, International Journal of Cultural inheritance & Social Sciences (IJCISS), Vol. 1, Issue 2, September 2019, pp. 80-109.

distinguished by each containing an oriental and an altar, and the number of these structures may increase to reach to seven or more¹.

Second: Coptic churches in Old Cairo

1. Hanging Church

The Hanging Church (fig. 1 pl. 1:7) is located on Mary Girgis Street in the Wax Palace area in ancient Egypt. This church is known as the Hanging Church of the Virgin Mary because it was built on two towers of the Roman fort. It is likely that it was built in the late fourth century or the beginning of the fifth century, and it went through a lot of modification and repair work, which was Some of them were in the Fatimid era², and some believe that the church was built much before the fourth century, as it was a Pharaonic temple, and then it was transformed into a church, which is confirmed by the presence of the remains of a temple beneath the church³.

The Hanging Church was probably built during the patriarchate of Isaac (690–692), though an earlier church building may have elsewhere existed dating as early as the 3rd or 4th century. However, the earliest mention of the church was a statement in the biography of the patriarch Joseph I (831–849), when the governor of Egypt visited the establishment. The church was largely rebuilt by the Pope Abraham (975–978) and has seen many other restorations including an extensive repair and restoration of the church and its surroundings completed in 2011. Objects of historical interest that were no longer of service went to the Coptic Museum. A set of 10 wooden panels from a door at the church that were engraved with Christian iconography in 1300 AD can be found in the British Museum.

The Babylon Fortress was a citadel built by the Romans and its origin is disputed by Coptic historians. Some date its origin to the nineteenth century B.C, after Pharaoh Sesostri defeated the Babylonians and took the prisoners of Egypt as slaves. The prisoners rebelled, building a fortress around their home which became known as Babylon. Others believe the fortress was built in the late sixth century B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar, king of

¹ Al-Bakhshawanji, , Ashraf Sayed. Mallawi Archaeological Churches, p. 207.

² Darwish, Mahmoud Ahmed. The Fatimid mosque in saint Catherine's monastery (archaeological study), International Journal of Cultural Inheritance & Social Sciences (IJCISS), Vol. 4 Issue 7, March 2022, pp. 1-11.

³ Butler, Alfred J. (2010) [1884]. *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt (Reprint ed.)*. Nabu Press [orig. Clarendon Press]. pp. 210–235.

Babylon, after conquering Egypt. The Hanging Church was erected over the citadel's old south Bastions, which marked the main gate to the fortress, and gives the church its 'hanging' feature. Beneath the church is the old atrium entrance, with niched walls that once contained statues. Superimposed columns and brick arches were later added to provide reinforcement for the building.

The Hanging Church is among the earliest churches in Cairo, competing only with Saints Sergius and Bacchus Church, or Abu Sirja. The church was restored in the sixth century, erasing much of the evidence of the church's origin. Carved reliefs, believed to belong to the earlier structure, closely resemble those found in the first Syrian churches, which can be dated to the third or fourth century. There is also a carved beam over the entranceway which can be dated to 284 AD., the starting date for the Coptic era.

In 840 AD, Governor Ali ibn Yahia the Armenian partially destroyed the church during a conflict with the patriarch Anba Yusab. It was later converted into a mosque until the tenth century, when it was reconsecrated. In the eleventh century, the Hanging church became the residence of the Coptic patriarchate, previously in Alexandria

Pope Abraham (975-978) commissioned one of the first major restorations of the church. The church has also undergone restorations during the reigns of Caliph Haroun El Rashid, El-'Aziz Bi'Allah Al Fatemi and Al-Zaher Al Eazaz Din Allah. In 1983, the chapel ceiling collapsed when an engineer had removed an interior column, damaging much of the artwork inside. The 1992 Cairo earthquake caused further damage to the walls of the structure, leading to an additional restoration in 1998 that was completed in 2011¹.

The church is preceded by an open courtyard with an external canopy. The area of this church is (23.5 x 18.5 m) and contains a courtyard divided into four aisles separated by three rows of columns. All columns are made of white marble except for one column of black basalt. Some of these columns have fresco drawings.

The courtyard and the temples are covered by a wooden truss. This church contains three temples, and the columns are surmounted by capitals of great archaeological importance in the Corinthian style dating back to the first century AH and were often transferred from Roman buildings or temples. These columns are located in three rows, the right and left of

¹Jehl, Douglas (August 16, 1998). "A 10th-Century Church is Rescued in Old Cairo". The New York Times. New York Times. p. TR3. Cuapani, Massimo and others (2002). Christian Egypt: Coptic Art and Monuments through Two Millennia. American University in Cairo Press. pp. 105–111.

each. Eight columns, while the middle row consists of only three columns.

The noble (pulpit) is made of marble, resting on fifteen columns bearing reliefs decorated with mosaics, and dating back to the eleventh century AD. Two of them were attached to the body of the noble, and the noble contained types of decorations that included the Greek cross, circles around the cross, the “Shell” sign, and shells. It is topped with a dome, which contains a drawing of a fan inside it. The contract is based on two columns¹.

The three galleries in the nave of the church end on the eastern side with three connected rooms representing structures that are separated from the galleries by wooden screens. The middle structure represents a square room that ends on the eastern side with a cavity (1.38 m) deep, and in the middle of this cavity is a small apse (23 cm) deep. However, this main cavity is occupied by a marble amphitheater with seven steps, three semicircular and four rectangular. In the middle of this room is an altar topped by a wooden dome on four marble columns. The room is covered by a wooden vault along the vault of the portico.

The southern structure is rectangular in shape (4.60 m x 3.80 m), with a large cavity on the eastern side, 1.70 m deep. In the middle of this room is an altar. In the main cavity there is a marble amphitheater consisting of four steps, two in a semicircular shape and two in a rectangular shape.

The northern structure is rectangular (6.10 m x 4.20 m) and its architectural elements are completely identical to the middle structure.

As for the veils, they were made of walnut wood inlaid with pieces of pine wood and ivory decorated with relief carvings, dating back to the 13th century AD. The decorations are square shapes that contain within them decorations of crosses, shapes, star plates, and circles. Each veil has a door opening with two leaves headed by a transcendent arch².

It contains a baptistery with a veil decorated with inlaid decorations and contains the door that leads into the baptistery. It is divided into small structures and is topped with an arch decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay. The baptistery is a deep basin made of granite stone and has inscriptions in the form of broken lines symbolizing water. This baptistery represents a small church in the southeastern side.

The structures of this church were erected on the floor of the Roman tower. It is divided

¹Khalil, Markus Aziz (1995). *Christian Antiquities in Egypt*, Part 1, Anba Ruwais Press in Abbasiya, 1, p. 74.

²Butler, Alfred (2012). *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt*, 1, p. 88.



into two parts, the first of which is rectangular in shape in the eastern side of a room with a cavity, while the second contains the baptismal font.

2. Abu Seifin Church

It is located north of Babylon Fort and bears the name of the martyr Saint Markorius, known as Abu Seifin (fig. 2 pl. 8-9). He was an army officer and converted to Christianity, and was martyred because of that in the year (365 AD).

The Church of Abu Seifin is the largest church in the ancient Babylonian region, and it may be the only church in Cairo whose original layout has not undergone any modification. It was destroyed at some point and was rebuilt during the reign of Patriarch Abram (974-979 AD). In the year 1080 AD, a meeting was held in this church. The church had 47 bishops at the request of the Fatimid Minister Badr al-Jamali to establish the laws to which the Copts were bound. A number of patriarchs spent some time in it during the period extending from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, and some patriarchs were ordained there in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. It was also used as a burial place for many patriarchs.

The church historian Abu Saleh Al-Armani spoke extensively about this church, unlike the other churches of the region, to the point that he called it (the dangerous pledge of allegiance to the martyr Markorius), and it was subjected to the fire of Fustat, so much so that Abu Saleh mentioned that nothing remained in it except its outer walls and a nice church inside it that was not burned, which is the Church of John the Baptist. The Mass continued there until it was decided for the Christians to renew the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Abu Seifin Church is distinguished from others by the absence of columns, and the two wings and the portico are separated from the courtyard by huge supports instead of columns. As for the internal walls of the balcony, there are no spaces or columns between them to lighten the load of the roof. The reason for this is that the church was built in the tenth century, which represents a period. The remains of Greek and Roman temples and palaces had disappeared before it. Among these pillars are very huge, represented by two in the east and two in the west.

These supports help raise a huge dome that covers the choir and the temple together. Halfway inside the courtyard, we find two strong rectangular supports adjacent to each side. There is also a smaller pillar on each side of each of the two pillars, and these pillars work to strengthen the two walls in the north and south. The western wall, or portico,

remains straight, but is illuminated by three openings covered by screens of wooden bars.

It also features many architectural and decorative elements and details that distinguish it from many churches in the ancient Egypt region.

The church is rectangular (35.37 m x 23.30 m), and the middle entrance faces the main church apse. Above the entrances is a row of window openings, where three identical windows can be seen, each consisting of two a rectangular opening in the middle of which is a combined marble column with a capital and a base. Above the windows is a wooden lintel, where the first floor of the facade ends and the second floor begins, in which there are two large rectangular windows, one above the southern window of the row.

The first and the other are above the northern window of the same row and sandwiched between them are three pointed-shaped windows. The northern and southern windows each consist of two a rectangular opening in the middle of which is a marble column with a capital and a pomegranate-shaped base. Each of the two openings has a latticework window, as do the three pointed windows.

It descends to this church by means of a stone step, where the entrance vestibule begins, with an area of (21.5 m) in length and (4.20 m) in width, and it is covered with a wooden ceiling. Within this transverse vestibule, the first row of windows opens to the front, and this hallway is divided into three vertical galleries. The middle one is more spacious (7.80 m), while the width of the two side galleries is (3.65 m). This hall is separated from the nave by a wooden curtain.

The middle portico is preceded by a colonnade of two large rectangular pillars sandwiched between marble columns with Corinthian-style capitals. The capitals of these columns are connected to the pillars by a thick wooden beam on top of which three small pointed arches stand. Each row consists of two large pillars with a lower pillar sandwiched between them. It is noted that these huge, overlooking pillars the middle portico is hollow in shape and pointed at the top. The middle portico is covered by a gabled wooden roof, while the southern portico is covered by a flat wooden roof, and the northern portico is covered by cross vaults.

The church pulpit is located in the northeastern side of the middle portico, which represents the courtyard. It is made of marble and rests on (15) small columns of marble as well. It is one of the most beautiful pulpits in Cairo as it is decorated with mosaics.

Two entrances have been opened in the northern wall of the church, one of which is in the

western side, where it leads to a modern hall attached to the northern side, and the second entrance is in the middle of this wall, where it opens onto an open courtyard. There are also three windows made of lathe wood in the same wall. As for the southern wall of the church, it has five windows and none. It has an entrance, and the three upper corridors of the church overlook the middle corridor through small windows with lattice windows.

These corridors are currently covered by flat ceilings of wood that can be accessed through stone stairs in a building added to an annex to the church on the northeastern side. The three corridors of the church on the eastern side end with three large arches that open onto the three structures. The middle of these represents the arch of the main apse and is distinguished by its height above the two side arches and is based on this necklace is on a thick wooden beam that rests on two marble columns with Corinthian capitals.

The main structure represents a rectangular room with an area of (12 m x 4.80 m), the middle part of which is covered by a dome. This dome bears three pointed arches on the western, northern and southern sides, while the arch on the eastern side rests on the cavity of the main apse. In fact, we do not find anything similar to the apse of this church among the apses of ancient Egyptian churches, as it is distinguished by its width (9.53 m) and depth (5.60 m).

However, its protrusion does not appear from outside the wall, and a large part of the space of the apse is occupied by the bottom of a large marble runway consisting of seven steps. Three of them are marble, three of which are semi-circular and four are rectangular. In the middle of the large apse cavity there is a small cavity with a depth of 57 cm. The marble amphitheater is preceded by the church altar, which is surmounted by a wooden dome on four marble columns. This structure is dedicated in the name of Saint Abu Seifein, and above its altar is a wooden canopy decorated with exquisite carvings.

The most important of them is a scene of Jesus Christ surrounded by the four creatures that symbolize the four Gospels and the Seraphim. There is also a white and red marble platform behind the altar. As for the eastern wall of the apse, it is decorated with a mural of Jesus Christ and the Seraphim, and the walls surrounding it are decorated with inscriptions representing the twelve disciples.

The southern structure consists of a rectangular room with an area of (4.93 m 3.98 m x 3.32 m) and is currently used as a storeroom for church tools and is covered by a flat wooden roof. The northern structure consists of a rectangular room (4.42 m through two

marble steps¹.

In the northern portico, a door opens into a courtyard where there is a building consisting of three temples and a baptistery. On the temples are veils, some of which date back to the late Fatimid era. One of them is distinguished by its fillings decorated with lush floral decorations (arabesques) depicting birds, animals, and saints, some of them on horseback. This iconostasis was in a shrine. Small St. George, which is located in the far east of the southern portico of Abu Seifin Church, was not affected by the fire that destroyed the church in the twelfth century.

This church is distinguished by the presence of stairs in the courtyard that lead to an upper church with many vestibules and five temples. Many efforts have been made in recent years to preserve the frescoes that were found in the southern vestibule.

The Iconostasis is a wonderful piece of art. It is made of ebony wood inlaid with chips of ivory decorated with carvings. Its entrance is surmounted by two rows of icons. In the middle of the upper row is an icon of Jesus Christ, to its left are icons of the Virgin Mary, the Archangel Michael, and three of the apostles, and to its right are icons of John the Baptist, the Archangel Gabriel, and three other apostles. The bottom row is decorated with small icons representing scenes from the Bible, these icons date back to the year 1762 AD.

As for the pulpit itself, one ascends to the pulpit through a carved entrance on wooden beams supported by marble columns. The balcony faces a rectangular wooden panel inlaid with marble mosaic work. On each side of the panel is a white marble column carved with inscriptions representing scrolls of parchment and ends with an oval crown. As for the pulpit itself it is circular surrounded by five semi-columns followed by triangular balconies. These columns and balconies are covered with fine mosaics of colored marble and mother-of-pearl. The complete arrangement can be seen inside the pulpit because the shrine located behind the pulpit completely hides three of the columns and three of the balconies.

The baptistery represents a three-foot-deep circular basin installed in a stone structure and surrounded by what looks like a wooden cupboard with a small wooden dome above it. We find that the doors of the cupboard are decorated with pictures representing flowers, and one can reach behind the southern barrier of the men's section through the second section of this baptistery.

¹Butler, Alfred (2012). *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt*, 1, pp. 83-96-110.

The sickle stands in the middle of the choir and is decorated with some geometric decorations. Above it is placed a reading book with some beautiful decorations. As for the long bronze candlestick next to the sickle and the silver quarry hanging on the candlestick, they are both antique and form two pieces of the most beautiful works of art. A number of silver and glass lamps descend from a high wooden beam in front of the temple barrier. And ostrich eggs covered with silver.

3. Abu Sarja Church

Abu Sarja Church (fig. 3 pl. 10-11) is considered one of the oldest churches in ancient Egypt, and according to tradition, there is a cave beneath it when the Holy Family fled to the land of Egypt.

The church was built in the name of the martyrs Sergius and Wachs, who were martyred in the era of Maximian. Many patriarchs were ordained there, including Anba Issac (Isaac). History mentions its establishment in the era of Abd al-Malik bin Marwan ((685-704 AD)). Then it was vandalized during the reign of Marwan II ((744-750 AD)) and the burning of Fustat ((799-819 AD)), then it was ruined again in the tenth century, then it was restored in the 11/12 century AD¹.

There are conflicting opinions regarding the name of Saint Sergius, after whom that church was built. There are two in its history with this name. One of them was martyred with his father and sister and has a feast held annually on the 13th of Amshir, and the other was affiliated with the Wakis, one of the makers of horse armor for Emperor Maximian, and he was martyred in the town of Rusafa in Syria, In the early fourth century during the reign of the emperor. These two martyrs have a high status among all Christian sects².

This church was established in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, and it was built in the same place where the Holy Family resided when they fled to Egypt from Herod, King of the Jews. It is no less important from a historical and artistic point of view than the Hanging Church. It was the first church in Egypt after the Monastery of AbuMakar in which the patriarchs celebrated the Mass after their consecration in Alexandria.

This church was demolished in the tenth century AD and was rebuilt again in the Fatimid era. Remnants of this church were found, represented by engraved stones and a door that expresses the splendor of Coptic art in the fourth century, and they were all transferred to

¹ Sowell, Anba (2002 AD). Guide to ancient churches and monasteries in Egypt, Cairo, p. 85.

² Habib, Raouf (1979). The Old Coptic Churches in Cairo, Cairo: Al-Mahaba Library, p. 30.

the Coptic Museum.

In fact, the history of this church is of great importance, and if it was named after two saints who had great fame in the history of Christian religious martyrdom in the early fourth century AD, namely Saints Sergius and Wachs, who were martyred, in the region of Rusafa in Syria, because of their conversion to the Christian religion during the period The reign of the Roman Emperor Maximian.

This church has assumed a special religious status among the Coptic churches, due to the story of the coming of the Virgin Mary, the Christ Child, and Joseph the Carpenter, on their journey of escaping from the face of Herod, King of the Jews, and their taking refuge in the cave, which is located below the church.

Al-Maqrizi mentions about this church, saying, “Bu Sarja Church,” near Barbara, next to Zawiyat al-Numan, in which it is said that Christ and his mother Mary, peace be upon them, sat.

However, this church was damaged due to the fire that broke out in the city of Fustat in the late Umayyad era, in the city of Fustat, causing damage to its buildings. Then it was renovated during the caliphate of Harun al-Rashid, as it was mentioned in the biography of Anba Markus (799-819 AD), in the history of The patriarchs rebuilt all the churches of the region at that time based on the request of this patriarch from the governor, and their architecture was also renewed during the Fatimid caliphate of Al-'AzizBillah, when Patriarch Avraham was allowed to renew all the sale of Egypt, and this was reported by Severus and Abu Saleh, among the news of the miracle of the transfer myth. Mount Mokattam during the Fatimid Caliphate of Al-'AzizBillah, and its architecture was renovated or its construction was renovated during the Al-Zahir Caliphate to honor the religion of God.

This church is located in the middle of the Roman fort. It was established in the late fourth or early fifth century in the name of Sergius and Wachs, who were army soldiers and were martyred at the beginning of the fourth century during the reign of Maximas. It was built during the reign of Caliph AbdAl-'Aziz bin Marwan when it was demolished and renovated at the end of the Umayyad era. It was renewed during the caliphate of Harun al-Rashid, just as its buildings were renewed during the caliphate of Al-'AzizBillah the Fatimid (365-386 AH/975-996 AD) when Patriarch Abraham was allowed to renew all of Egypt's sale. This church also took a special religious status among the Coptic churches because of its

connection to the story of the coming of the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, and Joseph in their escape and taking refuge in the cave located below the church. Tradition required the patriarchs to hold their first mass there after Alexandria.

Patriarchs of the See of Mark were also elected, and the first to be elected were Patriarch Shenouda (861 AD) and Abraham the Syrian. However, as a result of the competition between the Church and the Hanging Church, Patriarch Christodoulos transferred the See of Mark to the Hanging Church in the 11th century AD.

One enters the transverse hallway, which extends from north to south. It is 16.25 meters long and 3.40 meters wide. It is covered with a flat wooden roof and ends on the northern side with a large apse. A baptistery was added to the building.

The length of the church is (27 m) and its width is (17 m). It contains a courtyard surrounded by two porticoes and ends with three temples on the eastern side, fronted by a wooden veil with inlays inlaid with ivory and ebony. Surrounding the church are twelve columns with wall pictures of the disciples of Jesus Christ, the roof is gabled.

The nave is preceded by a colonnade of two large perpendicular pillars, between which are two marble columns surmounted by Corinthian-style capitals. The capitals of these columns are connected by a beam of three small, pointed arches. The columns of the church are distinguished by watercolor paintings (frescos), with the exception of one column, and scenes of the saints standing appear on the bodies of these columns. Their faces are surrounded by circles and painted in red, green and black.

Each pediment consists of a row of columns numbering five columns with Corinthian-style capitals taken from Roman buildings, and connected by a wooden beam on top of which the arches of the pediment stand, numbering six small pointed arches on each side. Thus, the number of Columns: (12) columns, including ten marble columns, one stone column and the other granite column.

The middle gallery of the church ends on the eastern side with the main church apse, which is a large apse with a capacity of (5.60 m) and a depth of (3.40 m) in the middle of which is a small apse surmounted by a circular canopy, and in the middle of the wall of the large apse is the top of a lamp window covered with glass and colored plaster. The main cavity of the apse is also occupied by an altar.

A large marble floor consisting of seven steps, four of which are semicircular and three rectangular in shape. On either side of the main apse there are two small rooms, one in the

north and the other in the south. As for the northern room, it is covered by a dome and its eastern side is topped by a three-step marble amphitheater.

The southern room is covered by a flat wooden ceiling. It is also noted that there is a small apse in the middle of the eastern wall of the southern room. It was originally covered by a dome similar to the dome that covers the northern room, but it was replaced by a wooden ceiling as a result of successive restorations. The three structures are preceded by a transverse hall, 16.60 meters long and 5.50 meters wide, which separates them from the rest of the western parts.

Wooden screens, and this hall is raised from the church floor by (49 cm) by a marble partition extending across the width of the church and consisting of two steps. There is a staircase descending to the church cave, which occupies the middle part of the lower hall.

The Iconostasis of the structure of the Abu Sarja Church is considered one of the oldest remaining wooden veils in the churches of ancient Egypt (4 AH/10 AD), as five fillings remain. It is represented by the Nativity filling (which bears the story of the birth of Christ, which is a common theme represented on various antiques) and the Last Supper filling. The right corner at the bottom of the filling is occupied by Christ kneeling on his feet facing Joseph, wearing a cloak. In the middle of the filling is a large cylindrical table whose frame is decorated with small circles in the middle.

A round dish in which a large fish is placed, to which Christ walks, then a human face, it includes a scene of the saints carried on two columns. At the top of each column is a triangle from which pair of curtains hang and between each two triangles is a circle with a large cross in the middle, and the saint on the back of his horse, with some minor differences. There are also fillings representing the saints. Standing on the same iconostasis, they hold the Bible in their right hands and wear long priestly robes. There was also a wooden pulpit inlaid with ivory and ebony, from which some fillings were placed in the Coptic Museum.

The northern and southern temples represent two squares. The northern structure is covered by a dome, the eastern structure is preceded by a terrace. The southern one is covered with a flat wooden roof. Above the altar is a wooden dome that rests on four marble pillars, and inside there are drawings representing Jesus Christ on the throne, surrounded by the four creatures, and then other scenes with the Cherubim and Seraphim angels underneath.

The cave consists of a courtyard and two hallways separated by two rows of columns. It is covered by a convex stone vault. The middle gallery is more spacious, and the row of the southern portico consists of five small marble columns, and the northern portico consists of four columns. The columns of this cave are distinguished by the fact that they do not have a specific style in shape, except for one column of the Corinthian style, and they are not based on bases, except for one column that rests on an inverted Corinthian capital.

As for the second floor of the church, the southern and northern sections are above the entrance vestibule and the western transverse vestibule, which is a vestibule that has the same extension as the width of the southern vestibules and was used in the past for women to sit during church services.

The Cave of Abu Sarja is considered a small underground church. It is located under the chorus of the choir and is part of the temple. Two sets of stairs lead to it, as previously mentioned, one in the northern wing and the other in the southern wing at the great buttress. The floor of the cave is 8 feet and 9 inches lower than the floor of the choir, or 7 feet and one inch lower than the floor of the church nave.

As for the floor of the church nave, it is about 5 feet and 1 inch lower than the ground level outside the church, and the latter is 7 feet and 6 inches lower than the ground level outside the Roman fort. Therefore, the cave floor is at least 21 feet and one inch lower than the ground level in ancient Egypt.

As for the Church of Abu Sarja, it is 13 feet lower than this level, the maximum length of the cave is about 20 feet, while its width is 15 feet. It has an arched roof in the form of three arches. It can be said that it consists of a courtyard with a northern wing and a southern wing. The two wings are separated by thin columns, numbering nine columns. In the line of these columns there are two walls that highlight the distance. 6 feet from the eastern wall of the cave, and between them is what looks like a structure, but there is no barrier or any kind of furniture here. Each column is about 5 feet high.

As for the capitals of these columns, they do not have a specific shape, except in one case: when the column has an old classical capital, knowing that the classical capital was used for the foundation, and there is one vertical tunnel near the southern entrance, which is winding and carved¹.

The general shape of the church consists of a regular rectangle and its style is basilica. It

¹Butler, Alfred (2012). *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt*, 1, p. 181.

consists of the portico, the nave, the northern and southern wings, the choir, and three altars in the eastern direction, each of which is in the structure designated for it. We find a mihrab in both the central and southern temples. As for the mihrab of the northern temple, it has a square end.

The map of Abu Sarja represents a normal style in Syrian churches that were built during the sixth and seventh centuries, such as the churches of QalbLuzah and Turmanin, or Al Barah, but these Syrian churches differ from the Coptic churches in terms of the use of carved stone in construction, and they also have wide windows and arches. Most important of all, it aims to impress the outside world with the architectural luxury it creates. We find this same layout in some of the churches of Anatolia, such as the Church of Cassla in Lycia, as well as in the Church of St. Irene in Constantinople, and in many ancient churches in Rome.

An attached balcony was erected over the two wings and the portico, which was originally used as a place for women during the Mass. This balcony connects on the northern side to the choir in the form of a wing, not far from the northern wing on the map. On the southern side of the church, the balcony above the choir and the southern side structure was lengthened.

The balcony has a flat roof, while the nave is covered with a pointed roof with wooden supports, like the roof of the Abu Seifin Church. It is known that metal is not used in Coptic ceilings, but the connections are nailed using screws. Outside, the ceiling of Abu Sarjah Church is painted with cement, revealing the main columns that protrude above the high ledge. The roof changes to a gabled roof over the central part of the choir and over the structure, while it is flat over the northern wing.

The structure of the northern wing remains a high dome. There is a second dome visible from the wing above the eastern end of the southern balcony. The openings leading from the balcony to the nave of the church were also closed with non-thick walls, in order to be used for service purposes. But space remains on both sides. The north and south are clearly visible. Each space was divided into two by two small columns, and each space had three small woodwork windows that allowed some light to enter the balcony.

As for the main building, it is illuminated by a window located on the eastern facade of the

truss, another window on the western facade, and a single skylight in the roof¹ of the courtyard, the result, of course, is the spread of darkness.

4. Saint Barbara Church

This church (fig. 4 pl. 12) is located within the fort walls of Saint Barbara Lane. It was founded in the late fourth or early fifth century AD and was dedicated in the name of Lady Barbara, who was born in the third century AD from a rich, pagan family. She converted to the Christian religion at the hands of the Egyptian scholar at that time, Origen, and her father became angry about that and killed her.

St. Barbara's Church stands north of the Coptic Museum and is east of the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus (Abu Serga), on the eastern side of Fort Babylon. It was originally dedicated to Abu Kir and Yohanna (or Ss. Cyrus and John). When the remains of St. Barbara were brought here, a separate sanctuary was built. Thus, there are now two separate churches that were built on this location. Athanasius, a wealthy scribe and a secretary of Abdel-'Aziz Ibn Marwan (governor of Egypt between 685 and 705 AD), had built the church. A door found during one of the church's many restorations could date as early as the 4th century. Between 1072 and 1073, the church was fully restored to house the relics of Saint Barbara. These relics remain to this day. The church was damaged again by another fire during the 12th century. The church was most recently renovated extensively between 1910 and 1922, when the khurus, a transverse room preceding the sanctuary, was sacrificed in order to allow more space².

The layout of this church consists of a rectangle whose length is (26.60 m) the church contains a pulpit similar to the pulpit of the Abu Sarja Church, as it consists of a rectangular booth supported by ten small marble columns. What draws attention in the Church of Saint Barbara are these wooden shapes, especially the Iconostasis, the middle structure, which is inlaid with ivory, and inside the middle structure there is the altar, and behind it is a staircase. The top is decorated with mosaics, and in front of The Iconostasis is the aforementioned marble pulpit.

The church begins from the inside with the transverse portico, or entrance vestibule, which

¹Butler, Alfred (2012). *Ancient Coptic Churches in Egypt*, 1, Cairo: Egyptian General Book Authority, pp. 168-169.

²Sacred Geometries. *The Dynamics of 'Islamic' Ornament in Jewish and Coptic Old Cairo*", *Sacred Precincts*, BRILL, pp. 158-177,

is (4.50 m) long and (3.60 m) wide. After the transverse portico, two rows of columns divide the nave of the church into three vertical porticoes, the widest of which is the middle (7.33 metres) and the northern and southern ones (3.26 metres). The portico is advanced.

The middle column consists of two large pillars perpendicular in shape, between them are two marble columns topped by Corinthian capitals. The capitals of the columns are connected to the pillars by a thick wooden beam on top of which three small pointed arches stand. Each column consists of a row of columns topped by Corinthian capitals and connected by a wooden beam on which six small arches rest. Also pointed in shape, the middle portico is covered by a wooden vault and the two southern porticos are covered by a flat wooden roof

The three vertical porticoes of the church end in the eastern side with the three temples. At the end of the main central portico we find a large, irregularly shaped apse with a small cavity in the middle (45 cm deep). The area of this large apse is occupied by the bottom of a marble amphitheater consisting of four semicircular steps and three rectangular steps, and a wall in the middle. The main apse has three small window openings in the form of semicircular arches of plaster inlaid with geometric shapes united with crosses. The main apse is surrounded by two small rooms, and ahead of the main apse and the two side rooms is a transverse hall with an area of (14.60 m x 3.55 m) covered by a flat ceiling of wood similar to the hall.

Located in the Church of Abu Sarja, there are some differences between the two previous rooms, as the southern one is distinguished by the presence of three squinches in the eastern, northern and southern walls, and this room is covered by a semi-dome. As for the northern room, it is similar to the previous one in that it contains two marble columns, in the presence of a semicircular cavity in the middle of the eastern side, and in that it is covered by two halves of the dome.

As for the second floor, which is above the northern, southern and western arcades, it also represents corridors covered with flat wooden ceilings and overlooking the central arcade, much like in the Church of Abu Sarja. This floor is reached by a stone staircase located inside an external building added to the southern side of the church.

As for the pulpit, it is similar to the pulpit of the Abu Sarja Church, as it consists of a

rectangular booth supported by ten small marble columns¹.

Conclusions

- The churches of ancient Egypt received continuous care during the Islamic era. They were damaged when Fustat burned and were renovated during the reign of Harun al-Rashid the 'Abbasid and Al-'Aziz Billah the Fatimid. They number ten churches with a rectangular and square plan.
- These churches take a rectangular plan consisting of the façade, the transverse entrance vestibule, the longitudinal porticoes, and the structures, as in the Hanging Church and the churches of Abu Sarja, Barbara, and Abu Seifin.
- These churches went through many modifications and reforms, some of which occurred in the Fatimid era.
- The veils were made of walnut wood inlaid with pieces of pine wood and ivory decorated with relief carvings, and date back to the 13th century AD. The decorations are square shapes containing within them decorations of crosses, shapes, star plates, and circles. Each veil has a door opening with two leaves headed by a cross arch.
- The hanging church contains a baptistery with a veil decorated with inlaid decorations and contains the door that leads into the baptistery. It is divided into small structures and is topped with an arch decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay. The baptistery is a deep basin made of granite stone and has inscriptions in the form of broken lines symbolizing water.
- The Abu Seifin Church was rebuilt during the reign of Patriarch Ibram (974-979 AD). In the year (1080 AD), (47) bishops gathered in this church at the request of the Fatimid Minister Badr Al-Jamali to draw up the laws to which the Copts are bound. A number of patriarchs spent some time there during the period. It extended from the eleventh century to the fifteenth century, and some patriarchs were ordained in it in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, and it was used as a burial place for many patriarchs as well.
- The veil of the Abu Seifin Church is a wonderful piece of art. It is made of ebony wood inlaid with chips of ivory decorated with carvings. Its entrance is surmounted by two rows of icons. In the middle of the upper row is an icon of Jesus Christ, and to its left

¹Kosegarten, Antje Middeldorf (2000). "Die mittelalterlichen Ambonenaus Marmor in den koptischen Kirchen Alt-Kairo". *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*. 27: 29–81.

are icons of the Virgin Mary, the Archangel Michael, and three of the apostles, and to its right are icons of John the Baptist, the Archangel Gabriel, and three others. Other apostles. The bottom row is decorated with small icons representing scenes from the Bible. These icons date back to the year 1762 AD.

- Abu Sarja Church was built during the reign of Caliph AbdAl-'Aziz bin Marwan when it was demolished and renovated in the late Umayyad era. It was renewed during the Caliphate of Harun al-Rashid, just as its buildings were renewed during the Caliphate of Al-'AzizBillah the Fatimid (365-386 AH/975-996 AD) when Patriarch Abraham was allowed to renew all of Egypt.
- The veil of the temple of Abu Serja Church is considered one of the oldest remaining wooden veils in the churches of ancient Egypt (4 AH/10 AD), as five fillings remain of it, namely the filling of the Nativity and the filling of the Last Supper. There was also a wooden pulpit inlaid with ivory and ebony, from which some fillings were placed in the Coptic Museum.
- The Church of Saint Barbara contains a pulpit similar to the pulpit of the Church of Abu Serja, as it consists of a rectangular booth supported by ten small marble columns. What draws attention in the Church of Saint Barbara are these wooden shapes, especially the veil of the middle temple, which is inlaid with ivory. Inside the middle temple is the altar and behind it. The amphitheater is decorated with mosaics above, and in front of the temple veil there is the aforementioned marble pulpit.

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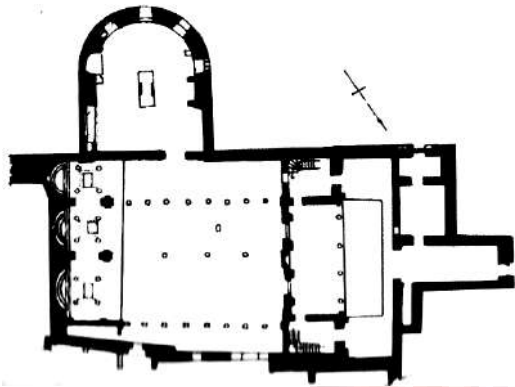


Fig. 1. The Hanging Church

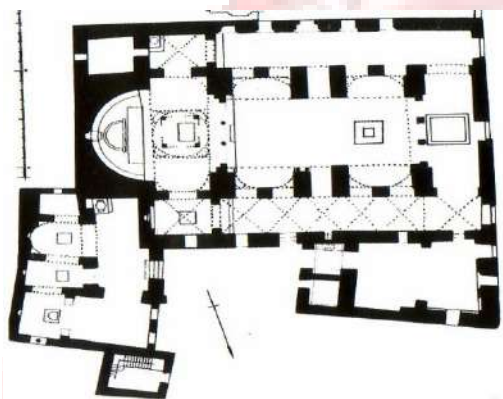


Figure 2. Abu Seifin Church

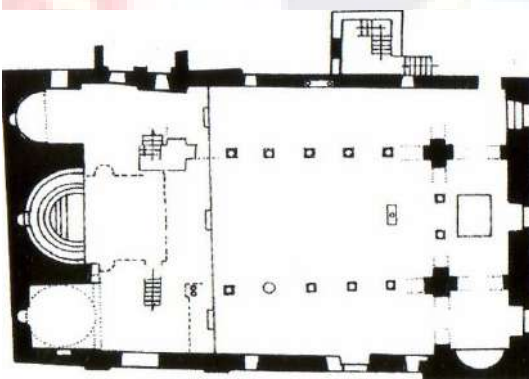


Fig. 3. Abu Sarja Church

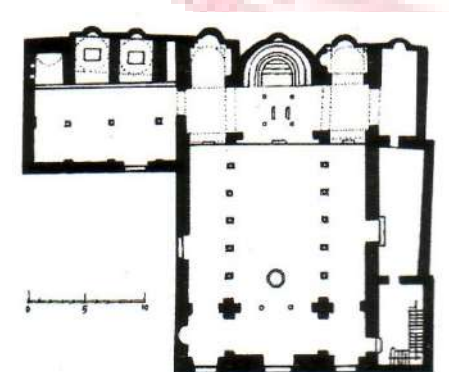


Fig. 4. Church of St. Barbara



pl. 1. The Hanging Church



Pl. 2. Entrance of the Hanging Church



pl. 3. The Hanging Church



pl. 4. The Iconostasis of the Hanging Church



Pl. 5. Wooden filling in the Hanging Church (6th AH / 12th AD)



Pl. 6. Part of a wooden lintel from the Hanging Church (5th AD)



Pl. 7. Two wooden fillings in the Hanging Church

On the first, “perpetual glory and happiness” and on the second, “permanent for its owner” (6 AH/12 AD)



Pl. 8. Abu Seifin Church



Pl. 9. The Iconostasis of Abu Seifin Church



Pl. 10. Abu Sarja Church



Pl. 11. Fatimid contracts in the Abu Sarja Church (10th century AD)



Pl. 12. Church of St. Barbara



Pl. 13. Fatimid arches in the Church of St. Barbara (10th century AD)



Pl. 14. The Iconostasis of the Church of Saint Barbara (10th-11th century AD)



Pl. 15. The Iconostasis of the Church of Saint Barbara (10th-11th century AD)