

BAWIT

History

The town of Bawit is located between Dayrut and Asyut. The site is famous through the excavations carried out there at the beginning of the twentieth century, the results of which were important for the history of Coptic art. From the numerous inscriptions discovered there, it is known that it was dedicated to a Saint Apollo, who seems to have been its founder. Unfortunately, the literary witnesses—a life of Phif (or PHIB), companion and friend of Apollo (Orlandi and Campagnano, 1975), and Greek papyri (Gascou, 1981, p. 220)—speak of an Apollo of another monastery, very near at Titkois (Greek) or Titkooh (Coptic).

Other texts speak of a Saint Apollo in the nome of Hermopolis Magna (today at al-ASHMUNAYN) but without specifying the place, such as Rufinus' *HISTORIA MONACHORUM IN AEGYPTO*, relating a pilgrimage by the hermits of Egypt during the winter of 394—395. In the Coptic fragments of the [Life of PAUL OF TAMMAH](#), it is related that he visited an Apollo in this same region (Amélineau, 1888-1895, pp. 759ff.). Finally, the *SYNAXARION*, which commemorates Phib and his friend Apollo on 25 Babah, speaks of a site called Jabal Abluj. These texts have so many common elements that it appears probable that there was an Apollo who had a friend and companion named Phib who died twenty years before him, and another companion called Papohe.

He was a monk and then no doubt superior at Titkois and, in his old age (perhaps eighty), founded a hermitage center at Bawit. The *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* relates that visitors were welcomed by the singing of psalms and that the hermits assembled daily for the Eucharist and a common meal and returned to their hermitages after hearing Apollo's teaching. This same scenario was followed when Paul of Tammah paid a visit to Apollo. Moreover, Paul noted that Apollo delivered his sermons sitting on a throne. The paintings found at Bawit present him

sitting on a divan with Phib and another monk named Anoup (Clédat, 1910).

It is very difficult to determine what kind of monastery Apollo founded, in view of the fact that only 5 percent of the site has been excavated and that it underwent many transformations between the founding and the abandonment of the monastery. It seems too much to affirm that the site is of Pachomian character with some “individual liberties” of an anchorite type (Torp, 1964, p. 185), for the excavations themselves have demonstrated the existence of cells outside the surrounding wall in the desert, and the numerous inscriptions attesting the cult of Apollo, which is always associated with Phib and Anoup, are found only on the walls of hermitages in Middle and Upper Egypt, at Wadi Sarjah, Dayr al-Bala’izah, and as far as Isna, but never on the walls of a monastery known to have been Pachomian.

It, therefore, seems more in conformity with what is known of Egyptian monasticism to think that the so-called *dayr* of Bawit was, at least in its origins, a common center for surrounding hermitages. The only difference between this and similar establishments is that the hermits assembled there for the Eucharist and a common meal, followed perhaps by an address from the father of the monastery, not every week but daily, as both the *Historia monachorum* and the fragments of the [Life of Paul](#) of Tamma clearly show.

If the monastery was indeed founded toward the end of the fourth century, the excavations show that it had become prosperous by the sixth century and as late as the ninth, but was destroyed, it seems, in the second half of the twelfth century (Torp, 1965, pp. 153-77).

It must be added that an establishment for women adjoined it but does not seem to have existed at the beginning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amélineau, E. *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne*. Paris and Leroux, 1888-1895.
- Chassinat, E. *Fouilles à Baouit*, Vol. 1. Mémoires de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale (13). Cairo, 1911.
- Clédat, J. "Recherches sur le kom de Baouit." *Comptes rendus de l'académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* (1902):525-46.
- . "Nouvelles recherches a Baouit." *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* (1904):517-26.
- . Le Monastère et la nécropole de Baouit. *Mémoires de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale* 12, 39. Cairo, 1904, 1906, 1909, 1916.
- . "Baouit." In *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, Vol. 2. Paris, 1910.
- Coquin, R.-G. "Apollon de Titkooh ou Apollon de Bawit<?" *Orientalia* 46 (1977):436-66.
- Drew-Bear, M. Le Nome Hermopolite. *American Studies in Papyrology* 21. Missoula, Mont., 1979.
- Gascou, J. "Documents grecs relatifs au monastère d'abba Apollon de Titkois." *Anagennèsis* (Athens) 1 (1981):219-30.
- Krause, M., and K. Wessel. "Bawit." *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, Vol. 1. Stuttgart, 1966.
- Maspero, J., and E. Drioton. *Fouilles exécutées à Baouit*. Mémoires de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale 59. Cairo, 1931- 1932.
- O'Leary, De L. *The Saints of Egypt*. London and New York, 1937; repr. Amsterdam, 1974.
- Orlandi, T., and A. Campagnano. *Vite dei monaci Phif e Longino*. Testi e documenti 51. Milan, 1975.
- Torp, H. "Murs d'enceinte des monastères coptes primitifs et couvents-forteresses." *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire* 76 (1964):173-200.
- . "La Date de la fondation du monastère de Baouit et de son

abandon.” *Mélanges d’Archéologie et d’Histoire* (Rome) 77 (1965):153-77.

- Walters, C. C. *Monastic Archeology in Egypt*, Warminster, 1974.

RENÉ-GEORGES COQUIN

MAURICE MARTIN, S.J.

Archaeology, Architecture, and Sculpture

Architecture

The archaeological site lies about 1.25 miles (2 km) west of the village of Bawit and about 17 miles (28 km) south of al- Ashmunayn. The ruins first became known in the last decade of the nineteenth century as a result of private digging, when investigations were made into the provenance of objects that came into the art trade. With the limited task of uncovering the [buildings](#) already visible and also finding out whether the *kom* (mound) contained any more monuments, J. Clédat, E. Chassinat, and C. Palanque between 1901 and 1904 and J. Maspero in 1913 cleared [buildings](#) and made several soundings.

At the end of these activities, which in intention and execution were far removed from a regular excavation, the substance of the most important building, the so-called South Church, was destroyed by the removal of the architectural sculpture; a selection of wall paintings that had survived the excavation was removed as well. The finds thus carried off are today located in the Coptic Museum in Cairo and the Louvre in Paris (de Graviers, 1932, pp. 51ff.). The excavators produced preliminary reports and partial publications of the excavation in which, however, architecture and sculpture were largely neglected. Only plans of the individual campaigns were published. There is no overall plan recording all the excavated complexes (a hypothetical attempt, incorrect in details, is Torp, 1981, pl. 1).

Since the soundings exposed only partial areas and the area of settlement was not systematically defined, we do not know the extent of the buildings, nor can we ascertain whether the main concentration of the total complex was then found and excavated. In conformity with the circumstances of these archaeological activities, there are for the monuments no datings assured by excavation data (stratigraphy, ceramics, coins). Since building phases and even rebuildings, which we can identify in many sections on the basis of old excavation photographs, were almost without exception not observed or even documented at the time, we have no clues as to the relative chronology of the complex.

The oldest chronological information in situ (from the beginning of the eighth century) was contained in painted inscriptions (cf. Krause and Wessel, 1966, cols. 570-71). They offer, however, only a *terminus ante quem* for the layer of plaster, but certainly not a reliable approximate estimate for the building concerned, which may have been considerably older, rebuilt, or put to new use.

It has now been shown beyond any doubt through inscriptions in the [buildings](#) of Bawit that the buildings excavated at that time belonged to the monastery of Apa Apollo, and a few published papyri of the ninth century from Bawit (Krause, 1958) give us detailed information about the conditions and financial transactions of that period in this monastery. The well-known wall paintings, most of which probably date from the seventh and eighth centuries, were certainly produced for the monastery.

We cannot, however, conclude from this that the early history of the monastery of Apa Apollo, known only through allusions and by no means clearly (see Timm, 1984, pp. 643-45), stands in causal relationship with the [buildings](#) of the *kom* of Bawit excavated at that time or that the original [buildings](#) on this ground were erected for the monastery of Apa Apollo. For example, clear evidence for activity in church building is lacking precisely from the critical period of the fifth century and the first half of the sixth. Imposing architectural remains deriving from this period

are rather remarkably untypical for church architecture (see below). The history of early building in Bawit (perhaps fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries) has not yet been materially clarified. An investigation of this problem would be extremely valuable.

Similarly, the decline of the monastery cannot be dated with certainty. Estimates vary from the year 900 to the fourteenth century. In favor of a fairly early date for abandonment of the monastery is the fact that the Islamic authors of the Middle Ages knew the site but did not mention the monastery.

Architecture

The excavation of the so-called [South Church](#) led to publication of a volume of plates (Chassinat, 1911) but only a minimum of written information. No consideration was given to the fact that the architecture shows unusual features for a church building, that strong stylistic anomalies in the architectural sculpture found there cannot be denied, and that the structure was accepted for decades as a homogeneous church building of the sixth century because of some column capitals [modeled](#) on impost capitals. It has [occasionally](#) been considerably overvalued architecturally (e.g., the conjectured reconstruction of it as a domed basilica, untenable on static grounds alone, or the claim that it was the source of all the important architectural sculpture found in the surroundings of Bawit).

A critical examination of the excavation photographs (Severin, 1977, pls. 32-38) has revealed that the structure went through two building phases, characterized by different wall-building techniques. The older consists of ashlar work and the later of bricks, or at least a brick base. The building sections of the earlier phase contain original architectural sculpture, while those of the later phase show the insertion or reconstruction of heterogeneous decoration, some of it reused pieces of work that fit very badly.

It has not yet been possible to determine the function of the parts belonging to the older phase. At any rate, they need not have been part of a church building. The provisional attribution of the older building sections to the fourth century has in the meantime been corrected to a date in the fifth century (Severin, 1986; cf. Effenberger, 1981, pp. 79ff.). The rebuilding, in which the thoroughly makeshift architecture of the [South Church](#) originated, must have been carried out at the earliest in the late sixth or even the seventh century.

Of the North Church, the excavators reported only that it lay to the north of the so-called South Church, was simpler in form, and had cruciform pillars, columns, and a wooden ICONOSTASIS. Sun-dried and burnt bricks and limestone were used as building materials. Recently the ground plan of the structure uncovered has been established on the basis of three old, unpublished excavation photographs. In particular, it emerged that here, too, building phases were clearly to be distinguished in the architectural remains. At least the cruciform pillars in the transverse section and parts of the east wall derive from an older construction of the pre-Islamic period. That they are the remains of an original church building on this site is improbable.

In a later phase, church architecture made its appearance through additions and reconstructions of brick wall work in compartments already existing and through the introduction of reused bases, columns, and capitals; the old excavation uncovered the ruins of this. The conversion of the early structure into a church can be dated at the earliest to the eighth century, as the existence of a proper *khurus* (room between sanctuary and naos) shows.

Perhaps the North Church, built into older architectural remains, superseded the South Church, which for its part originated in reconstructions of the late sixth or seventh century.

Scattered throughout the area and surrounded by a wall that could be

traced only in the northwest are several small buildings. Excavation has revealed that many of them were joined together to make up an irregular complex. Inscriptions indicate that some of them were dwellings (Krause, 1966, col. 569). The buildings, described as tomb chapels after the excavation by J. Clédat, were claimed to have been living quarters proper by J. Maspero in 1913 (Maspero and Drioton, 1931-1943, Vol. 5), who pointed out that no burials had been found and that the form of the buildings, the inscriptions, the iconography of the paintings, and the household goods found there spoke against their having been used for interments.

This is by no means the final word on the subject. It is beyond doubt that at the time of the oldest dated inscriptions (beginning of eighth century) the [buildings](#) were part of the Monastery of Apa Apollo and that the [South Church](#) came into being in the form of a rebuilding, at the latest in the seventh century. From the excavation photographs of many parts of the scattered building complexes, extensive reconstructions can be identified; this points to an architectural history marked by development and change. (An unfortunately arbitrary attempt to classify one of the building complexes into different phases is in Torp, 1981, ill. 2.) We ought to include in our reckoning the original structures in the area of the South and North churches, the function of which is not yet clear but which certainly were originally not church buildings.

Finally, one must not lose sight of the fact that only recently the entire picture of DAYR APA JEREMIAH, in terms of topography, history, and art history, had to be almost completely rewritten. Of building operations in the area of the *kom* of Bawit, at least in the fifth and sixth centuries, we know nothing for certain (extent, architectural form, and function), and therefore, for the time being, should rule out neither any future confirmation of the conventional interpretations nor the possibility of perhaps surprising new insights (such as the possibility that the first building phase was a necropolis).

Sculpture

The limestone and wood sculpture from Bawit (in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, the Louvre in Paris, the Early Christian and Byzantine Collection in East Berlin) is extraordinarily rich and stylistically varied. There are no firmly dated pieces. Many sculptures were indeed found in situ in the excavation, but a fairly large part of them were reused in the course of building, especially in the South Church. Hence, as a rule, we do not know for what position or for what type of architecture they were produced.

The high point of this local sculpture production in limestone was the fifth century and the first half of the sixth century, as in Saqqara, and in many cases there are quite astonishingly close similarities in the types and forms of the sculpture produced at the two sites. In the limestone sculpture of Bawit, as in Saqqara in the sixth century, there were also imitations of modern Constantinopolitan models (impost capitals, especially of the fold type), which in the particular case of a [figurative](#) and ornamental decorated pillar comes close to being a direct copy. Yet, on the whole, such pieces remain very rare and isolated.

They are far outnumbered by the characteristic examples of a local and markedly provincial production. Taken as a whole, the limestone sculptures do not reveal a uniform local style. They fall into several groups that follow different classes of models.

Quite unique are the wood sculptures of Bawit, often works of very good quality. They were mostly wrought for architectural decoration and probably derive from between the fifth and ninth centuries (Rutschowskaya, 1986), but their datings are still influenced by outmoded ideas and datings associated with the architectural history of Bawit.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Chassinat, E. *Fouilles à Baouit*, Vol. 1. Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale du Caire 13. Cairo, 1911.
- Clédat, J. "Recherches sur le kom de Baouit." In *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, pp. 525-46. Paris, 1902.
- . *Nouvelles Recherches à Baouit (Haute-Egypte): Campagnes 1903-1904*, pp. 517-26. Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres: Comptes rendus des séances de l'année 1904. Paris, 1904.
- . "Bawit." In *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, Vol. 2, cols. 203-251. Paris, 1910.
- . *Le Monastère et la nécropole de Baouit*. Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale du Caire 12 and 39. Cairo, Vol. 1, 1904-1906; Vol. 2, pt. 1, 1916.
- Effenberger, A. "Sculptura e arte minore copta." *Felix Ravenna quarta serie Fascicolo 1-2* (1981):65-102.
- Graviers, J. de. "[Inventaire](#) des objets coptes de la Salle de Baouit au Louvre." *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 9 (1932):50-102.
- Krause, M. *Das Apa Apollo Kloster zu Bawit: Untersuchungen unveröffentlicher Urkunden als Beitrag zur Geschichte des ägyptischen Mönchtums*. Leipzig, 1958.
- Krause, M., and K. Wessel. " Bawit." In *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, Vol. 1, cols. 568-83. Stuttgart, 1966.
- Maspero, J., and E. Drioton. *Fouilles exécutées à Baouit*. Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale du Caire 59. Cairo, 1931-1943.
- Palanque, C. "Rapport sur les recherches effectuées à Baouit en 1903." *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale* 5 (1906):1-21.
- Rutschowskaya, M. H. *Catalogue des bois de l'Egypte copte* (Musée du Louvre). Paris, 1986.
- Severin, H. G. "Zur Süd-Kirche von Bawit." *Mitteilungen des*

deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo 33 (1977):113-24.

- . *Gli scavi eseguiti ad Ahnas, Bahnasa, Bawit e Saqqara: Storia della interpretazioni e nuovi risultati (XXVIII Corso di Cultura sull'arte Ravennate e Bizantina)*, pp. 299-314. Ravenna, 1981.
 - . "Beispiele der Verwendung spätantiker Spolien: Ägyptische Notizen." In *Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst*
1. *W. Deichmann gewidmet*, ed. O. Feld and U. Peschlow, Vol. 2, pp. 101-104. Monographien des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums 10. Mainz, 1986.
- Timm, S. "Der Anba Abullu." *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, Vol. 2, pp. 643-53. Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, series B nr. 41/2. Wiesbaden, 1984.
 - Torp, H. *The Carved Decorations of the North and South Churches at Bawit*. Kolloquium über spätantike und frühmittelalterliche Skulptur 2. Vortragstexte 1970, pp. 35-41. Mainz, 1972.
 - . "Le Monastère copte de Baouit: Quelques notes d'introduction." *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 9 (1981):1-8.

HANS GEORG SEVERIN

Paintings

The extensive pictorial decor at the Monastery of Bawit is distinctive yet diverse in style. While a certain number of themes, subjects, or motifs may have parallels elsewhere, the Bawit pictures do maintain a distinctive character. Since there are multiple portrayals of the same idea in various places at the site, one finds notable variations in style (e.g., the group of Mary and the Apostles beneath the Triumph of Christ (Clédat, 1904), compared to the other examples of this theme). Some themes are narrative, in which case successive scenes may be fitted one within another (e.g., the Massacre of the Innocents); on the other hand, one

scene may fill a single panel in a juxtaposed series of events (e.g., scenes of the life of David).

The subjects most frequently portrayed are Christ, His childhood, His baptism, His triumph, Mary, the angels, the apostles, Coptic saints, hunting, various symbols, and decorative elements, both plant and geometric.

There are four styles of pictorial decor at Bawit. The first— which rarely appears—derives directly from the Alexandrian “Graces and Divinities of Happiness” (e.g., the Triumph of Christ cited above). Even though this style is slightly mechanical because of the stereotyped movement of certain parts of the ensemble, it is balanced by other individual poses. Above all—in contrast to other examples of this theme at Bawit itself—the uniform turning of the heads toward Christ enthroned brings out a notable realism, and herein lies an important clue for dating it. Moreover, this is not a copy of the Hellenistic Graces but rather a Coptic interpretation thereof, as can be seen by the compression of the bodies, the slight enlarging of the pupils, and correction of the outline.

The second style evidences a completely different influence that is no less strong and indicates a sort of Byzantine implantation at Bawit. It is undeniably the work of very good Byzantine painters or talented Coptic students.

The most typical scene—unfortunately an isolated one—is that of the gazelle hunt, in which the clothing offers proof of Byzantine influence. While Clédat thought he detected therein a Persian influence, it can be more simply explained as a transmission of these clothing details through the Byzantine occupation of Egypt at Antinoopolis in the sixth and seventh century, as is evidenced by the silk fabrics excavated there. All doubt is excluded by the long blouse gathered at the waist over tight-legged pants, with its black borders and consistent dark-green color highlighted by bright reflection. The same may be said for the very

harmonious composition found in the bodies and limbs of the human figures and the elegant forms of the gazelles. However, the vagueness of the facial features most likely indicates a Coptic artist.

Another scene, many times repeated, deserves mention. It consists of juxtaposed figures, two of them holding a key. They stand beside three other figures seated on a cushioned divan or decorated banquette, one of whom is facing front while the other two flank him in a three-quarter or profile position. The drape of the folds in the clothing—particularly in that of those seated—is closely related to the well-known drape common to Byzantine art in the sixth century. Here again, the faces are impersonal. Fortunately, however, the inscription of the names—collected and noted by Clédat—permits one to interpret these scenes as an homage to the great names of Coptic monasticism. A recourse to Coptic painters trained in the surrounding Byzantine classicism could be a confirmation of this.

The third style, the one most common at Bawit, takes its inspiration from the above and can be seen in groupings, usually consisting of monks juxtaposed and often identified or personalized by insignia that may be functional (a saint, a book, or a key, if not a lamp or vase) or perhaps historic. In addition to the study of the folds of their long, usually white robes, certain decorations indirectly provide a date for this style, which is the ninth century. For instance, in a monk's long tunic, one finds the motif of ribbons and rings against a violet background decorated with a plant having ascending or descending branches, all executed in ecru and outlined in the finest manner. The faces of this style, with their different coiffures and beards, show more realistic traits. The scenes of the Triumph of Christ, which are more conventional, also appear to belong to this period.

The last style is one in which convention has become the rule, with heavy bodies, folds of identical clothing, and faces that vary but reveal no attempt to portray the actual person.

Ornamentation followed the same evolution. As with the sculpture in relief, it became more and more “mechanical.” Nonetheless, such ornamentation has the merit of providing frames to scenes depicting human figures, also introducing a fantastic element unusual to such conventional art, and thereby giving it great vitality.

The variety of subjects is enormous and covers a large part of Christian iconography. However, certain subjects of prime importance do not appear at all, such as the Passion, the cross, the Resurrection (not even in its Byzantine form of the Descent of Christ into Hell), and the Ascension (not to be confused with the Triumph of Christ, which appears frequently). Nonetheless, thanks to the scope of the monuments now excavated and the considerable number of frescoes brought to light, the sampling is complete enough to make such absences insignificant, counterbalanced as they are by the importance given to the Triumph of Christ and, consequently, His humanity as well as His divinity.

The subjects found at Bawit may be classified into two categories: first, themes about Christian personages, such as Christ, Mary, angels, prophets, saints, and monks; and second, decorative or symbolic themes, usually meant for liturgical use or having ornamental value with a more or less precise symbolism.

Christian Personages

Christ. The iconography of Christ is more important by the way it portrays God the Savior than by the variety or frequency of its use. Christ’s life on earth is depicted in a certain number of scenes. Though each can be seen in only one example (save a few exceptions to be considered later), in discussing them, we cannot exclude the possibility that others may have been destroyed or have not as yet been discovered. One series for which there is a single example in each case is that of the childhood of Christ. Found in Chapel 51, it juxtaposes the Annunciation, the visitation and departure from Elizabeth’s home, the Nativity, and

finally, the massacre of the innocents (Clédat, 1904-1906, Vol. 1, pp. 524-25, pl. 4).

From the public life of Christ, there are three scenes: the Baptism of Christ (found in two strikingly different examples), the Miracle at Cana, and the Last Supper.

The identification of the Miracle at [Cana](#) in Bawit is hypothetical. The excavator, Clédat (Vol. 2, 1916, p. 6), thought it to be the Last Supper, and one should not underestimate his interpretation. Nonetheless, until there is further inquiry based on a more thorough documentation of the history of this excavation, it is clear that some essential elements of this scene have long since been destroyed, since one can see only a few personages reclining for a meal and eight amphorae in alignment, of which seven are painted blue and one red. The repetition of these amphorae and their differences in color seem to favor the identification with Cana. The richness of those elements that have survived from this scene would seem to date it from the sixth century.

The Last Supper occupied the back of the sanctuary of the South Church. The photography of this scene now extant is of bad quality, but it does portray the table at which Christ is seated, surrounded by His apostles. The poses of these figures denote a late date corresponding to the last years of the monastery.

No other portrayals of Christ's life on earth—not His miracles, preaching, or other events mentioned in the Gospels, including those of the Passion—have been revealed by the excavations. On the other hand, Christ in His celestial glory is portrayed at Bawit in a number of examples. These are of two types, one isolated and relatively simple, and the other more elaborate and complex.

The first is characterized by the pose of Christ facing front, sitting between an eagle and an ox (chapel 26). Christ, beardless, holds the Holy

Book on His left arm while pointing to it with His right hand. The rather sumptuous and classical style dates this painting to the sixth century.

The second type of this theme, enriched with divers details, forms the upper half of a scene in which the lower level portrays Mary surrounded by two groups of figures facing front. Because of its greater complexity, this type clearly appears to have been inspired by a more Coptic style that can be recognized by its compressed character, in addition to certain other aspects, such as the coloring (thought to be inspired by the Ascension of the sixth- century Syrian Gospel of Rabula), that indicate a later date, probably the seventh century.

The general schema of the upper zone comprises the sun and moon placed in the corners, Christ enthroned beneath them, facing front, encircled by a mandorla that may be supported by the four evangelical symbols and flanked by two archangels, two local saints, or even by the four evangelists grouped two on each side. Christ, who may be pictured with or without a beard, is holding the Holy Book. The details above Christ in his glory may vary. The mandorla itself, of a wider almond shape than usual, tends to a perfect circle. In the group found in chapel 17, some of the heads—each framed in a medallion—are those of the evangelistic symbols, with the head of a man replacing that of a woman.

In the lower zone of this scene, the central figure is Mary, enthroned either with or without the Holy Child or else standing without the Child in an orant pose (Chapel 17, pl. 41). The groups of figures juxtaposed about her, augmented on the sides by one or two local saints, are most generally the apostles.

Superposing two zones whose figures are all juxtaposed and facing front does not indicate a simple dualistic concept. The ensemble forms one entity whose apparent line of separation conceals a close relationship between the figures of the lower zone, who mystically exalt Christ, and the divine inhabitant of the upper one. Although it distinguishes the

earthly figures from Christ triumphant in glory, this scene abolishes the restrictions of time and makes the Eternal all-important. This transcendence is underscored in the scenes wherein the seated Virgin holds on her lap the infant Jesus, who, in such cases, is not also pictured in His celestial exaltation.

To these portrayals of Christ must be added a medium-sized medallion discovered in the excavations at Bawit by the Coptic Museum of Cairo and now on display there. Here Christ's figure is a bust flanked by two angels.

As can be judged from the above, the pictorial iconography of Christ at Bawit is rich despite the above-mentioned lacunae. While reflecting the reality of time as one indivisible entity, this iconography seems to emphasize Christ's human nature by portraying the cycle of His childhood and His baptism even as it shows His divinity by insisting on the theme of the Triumph of Christ.

Mary. Apart from the scenes of the Childhood of Christ cycle— which belong to the narrative [genre](#) and of which there is but one example known at Bawit—the portrayals of Mary at this site concern her divine motherhood and the homage paid her.

A realism that emphasizes the solemnity of this theme emerges from the *Galactotrophousa* (Mother nursing her child) found in a niche, wherein Mary is enthroned but as a bust with her child lying crosswise, whom she nurses at her right breast. The painting seems to belong to the fifth or sixth century.

The essential element of solemnity conferred upon her by the restricted movement is generally evidenced both by her enthronement and by the child seated facing front at her left side. There are some details, however, which modify this solemnity— notably, the figures added to the scene. Such additions might consist of an archangel followed by a deacon at

each side of Mary's throne or a series of persons, as in chapel 7.

It is also in Chapel 3 that Mary, enthroned with Jesus at her side facing front, is flanked by two groups, each one consisting of many juxtaposed figures proceeding to the outer edge of the scene. The first two figures are saints standing, crowned with a halo, holding in one hand a diadem and in the other a staff that terminates in a red cross-bearing disk. Then follow two local saints (of whom one is named Apollo), prophets, and an archangel.

Another rather late development (ninth century, according to the figures' clothing) sets Mary enthroned between two angels, each holding in his right hand an incense burner while the right arm supports an incense box. Christ's importance is increased by the fact that He is seated in a small circular mandorla that Mary holds in her two hands in front of her breast.

The still more solemn and cosmic role given to Mary—either enthroned or alone and standing in an orant pose—appears in the scenes depicting the Triumph of Christ.

Holy Personages.

The category of *holy personages* includes the saints and [prophets](#) of the Old Testament and Christian saints and monks.

In chapel 12, within a frame bordered by garlands of vines and twisted fringe, is a long line of prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. These figures are damaged more often than not, but if one may judge by two of the better-conserved ones (Amos and Habakkuk), they are crowned with haloes and wearing a tunic held in at the waist by a belt, covered by a pallium at the shoulders and revealing beneath its hem the bottoms of tight pants and ornamented sandals. Each

personage is holding an unrolled scroll upon which is inscribed a passage from his work. Between [Haggai](#) and Zechariah there is inserted a scene of a bow-and-arrow lion hunt. Beneath this high frieze there are figures representing the Virtues (busts), birds, marine animals, and putti (cherubs), all of which alternate and interlace with each other. These paintings, highly colored and well drawn, probably date from the beginning of the monastery.

Also in this category are pictures of the youth of David.

The apostles are not absent from Bawit, for they are depicted around Mary in the lower register of the Triumph of Christ. But they do not appear to have been portrayed individually, not even Peter or Paul.

Apparently no one has as yet identified either the pictures or saints' names among those figures often crowned with a halo and clothed in a long white tunic who are juxtaposed—frequently at a three-fourths angle—and whose lineup recalls the processions of the martyrs of Saint Apollinaris at Ravenna. They may perhaps be recognized as Copts by their short beards that terminate in a goatee. The only saints that seem to have been identified are VICTOR, PHOIBAMMON, and Sisinnios (see SAINTS, COPTIC).

Monks are often portrayed, but none of them can necessarily be identified even when his name, preceded by the title Apa (Father), is mentioned, for the same name is repeated for different monks. Their clothing consists primarily of a long tunic, a pallium, and sandals. The name of one monk has survived on a panel conserved at the Louvre, which identifies the personage as MENAS, who was once of the monastery of Bawit.

Certain local saints (one of whom is identified as Apollo) are placed standing on each side of Mary enthroned.

Angels Archangels, and Demons. As is particularly suitable in Egypt,

angels are to be found in all types of scenes and ornamentation. As in Byzantine art, they form the almost obligatory bodyguard of Mary. Often they are pictured in medallions as busts crowned with haloes and may be recognized both by their short haircut and bangs (a “Joan of Arc” haircut) and by the upper part of their wings protruding into the register above.

There are some instances in which an angel is the principal figure in a single scene. For example, there is the angel standing and holding against his bosom the Three Hebrew Children of Babylon, who, reduced to the size of infants, rest against his cloak. One also finds scenes in which, at the left of a row of monks proceeding from the center, there is an angel holding a staff that terminates in a cross, standing between two of the monks, who are also standing and holding a Holy Book. There is another scene with an angel holding a disk in one hand and a staff capped with a cross in the other, flanked by monks standing—one of whom is named Apollo—each carrying a Holy Book. An angel, flying above and behind Saint Phoibammon on horseback, is holding a circular crown ready to be placed on his head.

The three great archangels also have their place in the chapels of Bawit. Saint Gabriel is depicted at the right of the Virgin Mary in one of the pictures of her as the Mother of God. Saint Michael and Saint Raphael are portrayed elsewhere.

Demons are rarely pictured, and only—so it seems—beneath a symbolic personage, whether it be the demoness Alabastria conquered by Saint Sisinnios or those animals that have traditionally been emblems of evil since pharaonic times: scorpions, serpents, crocodiles, ibis, and hippopotamuses, to which may be added the mummified owl depicted in the above-mentioned picture of Saint Sisinnios.

Without exception, angelic figures—who may be identified by their deeds—wear a long tunic with sleeves, which may be simple but is more often decorated, usually with stripes descending from the shoulder, a

border around the hem and up the sides, squares or small circles (*orbicula*) that descend from the shoulder, and/or lateral ornaments with an interior design, either [figurative](#) or decorative. The demoness, on the other hand, has her upper torso bared.

Ornamentation and Symbols

With the exception of decorative motifs found in architecture using geometric designs or plants from nature as handed down from Hellenistic tradition, ornamentation may indicate sacred symbolism. In certain cases, the symbolism is Christian.

Plants. The [acanthus](#) is used profusely, as in the friezes and interlacings that are often inhabited by various creatures. One of these interlacings alternates circles and lozenges, with the circles containing the head of an angel or a saint (male or female), while the lozenges enclose birds (sometimes a peacock) along with fruits and plants. In the spaces between the circles and lozenges there is a basket of fruit; in another chapel there are interlacings containing busts of the allegorical Virtues, eagles, putti, and marine animals alternating with each other.

In chapel 3 the baseboard is composed of square parterres of flowers diagonally juxtaposed. These parterres differ from one another by their manner of displaying the flowerets; thus, some stand tall on their stems, whereas others show only the petals unfolding. However, each parterre shows but one single floral example repeated ad infinitum and set in a complex of intersecting lozenges. It is entirely possible that these imitation gardens may be—as in the catacomb paintings at Rome—an evocation of the Garden of Eden via the intermediary Elysian Fields.

A pomegranate tree and low plants at the foot of a mountain form the natural decor of a symbolic lion hunt.

Animals. There is an Elysian evocation in the positioning of poultry and

garden birds, among which one may cite the peacock that inhabits the interlacings in chapel 18. The peacock, inherited from pharaonic times, succeeded the phoenix as a symbol of eternity. Thus, at Bawit it has not left its native habitat, though it appears in Hellenistic landscapes.

The eagle—which in Coptic art is sometimes confused with the peacock or dove—is well portrayed three times at Bawit, always facing front with wings outspread. It appears in chapel 12, where it alternates in the interlacings with divers other objects; chapel 27, where a medallion hangs from its neck; and chapel 32, where it is given a rich necklace terminating in a metallic crescent from which hangs a flower-shaped cross. The eagle is holding in its beak a Coptic cross.

A hind-shaped unicorn with front hooves hobbled takes shape near the monks of chapel 17. The elegance of the design and colors dates this scene to the fifth or sixth century. It is possible that it may already be a symbol of the Incarnation.

A bow-and-arrow lion hunt—highly colored, set in a decor of mountains near low plants and a pomegranate tree—separates the [prophets Haggai](#) and Zechariah in the Chapel of the Prophets. The feline is turning its head in the direction whence came the arrow, which has pierced its right eye and cranium. This may be an allusion to the freeing of Israel announced in Zechariah 11:3: “Hark, the roar of the lions, for the jungle of the Jordan is laid waste!” The feline, though somewhat stylized, is skillfully drawn and posed.

The same may be said for a bear with its tongue hanging out placed near a saint in chapel 17. The pose indicates a realistic portrayal, one carefully observed and well drawn.

To these scenes must be added the marine animals that alternate with other subjects in some interlacings.

A beardless soldier, perhaps an infantryman, is found in chapel 18. He is standing, clothed in a short tunic (with sleeves covering his arms to the wrist), of which the upper part—decorated on the shoulders and down the center by a colored stripe—recalls a Byzantine military uniform.

The Virtues of Faith, Hope, Charity, Patience, and the rest may be seen alternating with the other subjects noted above (eagle, putti, marine animals) in an interlacing placed in a register beneath the row of prophets.

At the Monastery of Bawit the cross may be depicted as such, with no symbolic overtones. It may be the Roman cross upon a cruciform pedestal, decorated with simple interlacings in the crosspiece, from which hang two lamps. One also finds the ansate cross, itself decorated in the empty spaces with precious stones. Finally, in chapel 1, one sees the cross supported by the branch of a laurel tree, which implies heroic overtones.

The cross may also appear as a Christian emblem on some objects. Such is the case of the Coptic cross found on vestments or on the picture of a bronze lamp.

Geometric Designs. A baseboard of juxtaposed squares enclosing a floweret, each separated by intersecting lozenges, has been discussed above with plants.

In the grand reception hall at Bawit, there was a rather high plinth about 4 feet (1.20 m) covered with approximately twenty colored squares set in succession, each showing various combinations of curved or straight lines to distinguish it from the next. The style recalls a [genre](#) of Byzantine ornamentation, but it is quite possible that the artist may have invented a new ornamentation here. It can be dated to the sixth or seventh century.

A liturgical lamp hanging by a chain from a sort of railing is painted in a

scene clearly meant to be liturgical. The lamp is patterned after those bronze lamps that have an elongated body closed at one end and prolonged by a beak at the other. The belly, which is visible, is decorated with a Coptic cross between two vertical dotted lines. Also to be mentioned are two bronze lamps that hang from the crosspiece of a cross.

There survive only rare but important elements from Bawit. Some are located in the Coptic Museum at Cairo, and there is one painted panel in the Louvre. However, as can be seen, the photographs taken by [Jean Clédât](#)'s mission at the site in 1903—with their colors often reproduced by Clédât's talented artist, François Daumas, and complemented by the excavator's research—provide a good survey of the most important items from what is perhaps the largest surviving collection of Coptic paintings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Chassinat, E. *Fouilles à Baouit*. Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale 13. Cairo, 1911.
- Clédât, J. "Recherches sur le kom de Baouit." In *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres*, pp. 525-46. Paris, 1902.
- . "Nouvelles recherches à Baouit (Haute Egypte); Campagne 1903-1904." *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres*, pp. 517-20. Paris, 1904.
- . "Baouit." In *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, Vol. 2, pt. 1, cols. 203-251, ed. F. Cabrol. Paris, 1910.
- . *Le Monastère et la nécropole de Baouit*. Mémoires publiés par des membres de l'Institut français d'Archeologie orientale 12 and 39. Cairo, Vol. 1, 1904-1906, and Vol. 2, 1916.
- Drioton, E. "Un Bas-relief copte des trois hébreux dans la fournaise." *Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte* 8 (1942):7.
- Krause, M., and K. Wessel. " Bawit." In *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, cols. 568-84. Stuttgart, 1966.
- Maspero, J. *Fouilles exécutées à Baouit* (notes taken and edited by E. Drioton). Mémoires de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale 59.

Cairo, 1932-1943.

- Régnier de Crozals, F. *Eléments de base pour servir a l'étude de la vie quotidienne des moines au monastère de Baouit d'après les inscriptions et les monuments*. Mémoire de l'Ecole du Louvre. Paris, 1987.

PIERRE DU BOURGUET, S.J.

Tags: [Places](#)