

## **DAYR ANBA BAKHUM ([al-Sawam'ah](#) Sharq)**

### **History**

In the small town of [al-Sawam'ah](#) Sharq, 5 miles (8 km) north of AKHMIM, is a church dedicated to Saint Bakhum (PACHOMIUS) and his sister Dalusham, martyrs under DIOCLETIAN.

The first author to mention this church was the Jesuit C. SICARD. He spoke briefly of the church (the monastery had no doubt disappeared) in his famous *Parallèle géographique* (1982, Vol. 3, pp. 38-39). Although the inhabitants of the place told him that this Pachomius was a martyr, Sicard believed that he was the Pachomius who shaped Egyptian cenobitism. Granger also mentioned this monastery some years later, but called it Deir Habouba-Comé (1745, p. 98).

A panegyric by Abraham, bishop of Qift (the date of which is unknown), on the titular saints of this *dayr*, Anba Bakhum and his sister Dalusham, has been published by Nabil al-Manqabadi (1969, pp. 4-11) after a manuscript preserved in this church. It is now evident that the titular saint of this monastery is not Palamon, the disciple of Saint Pachomius, the founder of the cenobitic life.

All that remains of the ancient monastery is the church, which has, moreover, been reconstructed on the foundations of the old one (Meinardus, 1965, p. 195; 1977, p. 401). This church is mentioned by S. Clarke in his list of the churches (1912, p. 213, no. 19).

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## **Architecture**

Of this monastery only the church has survived. It is dedicated to the famous Saint Pachomius, founder of cenobite monasticism, and his sister, whose icon is in the church. Timm (1984, p. 655) identifies this monastery with the Pachomian foundation at Tse in the region of Shmin, the ancient name for Akhmim.

The church has passed through three building periods. An early basilican church with a triconch sanctuary was transformed during the Middle Ages into a smaller centralized structure, which has been slightly enlarged in more recent times. The eastern and southern apses still survive, together with a square room between them in the southeast corner. The apses contain niches with angled gables (crowns with broken tympanum) similar to those in the churches of DAYR [ANBA SHINUDAH](#) and [DAYR ANBA BISHOI](#) at Suhaj on the other side of the Nile, causing P. Grossmann (1980) to date this church to the seventh century.

Such dating makes it the oldest surviving church in the Akhmim area and possibly an influence on DAYR ANBA BISADAH, south of Akhmim. The basic shape of the original nave and aisles is indicated by the remains of four of the piers that supported the original wooden roof. Two are

embedded in the heavier piers between the present nave and choir, and one in the west wall. The foundation of the fourth can be seen in the courtyard that now occupies much of the space of the original aisles and nave.

Over the entrance to this courtyard is a block with a pharaonic inscription, possibly retained from the first building phase, since use of spolia (capitals reused from older buildings) became less common later. A marble altar table in the present southern sanctuary, the original eastern conch, is of an early type illustrated by A. J. Butler (1884, Vol. 2, p. 8).

When the church was cut down to a centralized building, large piers had to be built around two of the small original piers in order to support domes. More recently, three rooms have been built at the north, and a column has been added to support the new domes. The dome in front of the southern sanctuary is supported by brackets and squinches. The other units are covered by domes on pendentives.

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