

## [PBOW](#)

### **History**

[Pbow](#) is the Coptic name of the second and most important monastery of Saint PACHOMIUS. For centuries the superior of the whole Pachomian congregation resided at Pbow. The site is now considered equivalent to the town of Faw al-Qibli (Faw of the South, in contrast with the neighboring village Faw al-Bahari, Faw of the North). PACHOMIUS established a community there, his first foundation at TABENNESE seeming to him to have become too restricted. He built a small church, and it was there that he died in 346. His successor was PETRONIUS, who died some months later and was followed by HORSIESIOS. Following a revolt against him, Horsiesios had to give up the direction of Pbow and the Pachomian congregation to Theodorus in 351.

He recovered control upon Theodorus' death in 368, and remained superior until about Of the other successors of Pachomius we know only the names: Bessarion, Victor, Paphnutius, Jonas Pakerius (perhaps the upright), PACHOMIUS THE YOUNGER, Cornelius, Peshentbahse, Martyrius, and Abraham. Abraham, driven from [Pbow](#) because of his attachment to Monophysite doctrines, founded his own community at Farshut, his birthplace. In the fifth century a basilica dedicated to [Saint Pachomius](#) is said to have been begun by the abbot Victor, and completed and consecrated by Martyrius, according to a sermon that contains some legendary aspects but without doubt has historical elements, according to van Lantschoot. (1934, pp. 13-56).

The further course of the history of [Pbow](#) is lost in the mists of time. ABU SALIH THE ARMENIAN in the early thirteenth century states that the great basilica (it was, he says, 150 cubits long) was demolished by al-Hakim, no doubt in the great persecution of the Christians of Egypt at the beginning of the eleventh century. The Muslim historian Yaqut (d. 1229) mentions it, perhaps from hearsay. In the fifteenth century, [al-Maqrizi](#)

speaks of a church of Pachomius at Idfa, which he no doubt confuses with Faw. Al Mubarak reproduces the information drawn from al-Maqrizi's book (see the [translation](#) of the latter in Sauneron, p. 56). Not until 1720 is it mentioned by a European traveler, C. Sicard (1982, Vol. 2, pp. 146-47).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, M. JULLIEN gave an exact description with a photograph (pp. 243-48). Lefort mentions it among the sites of the first Pachomian monasteries (1959, pp. 387-93).

The recension of the SYNAXARION of the Copts from Upper Egypt cites the monastery of Anba [Bakhum](#) at Faw several times, but it probably is summarizing lost Coptic texts. Its evidence can be valid only for the documents used by the redactor: at 13 Hatur and 23 Tubah. [Meinardus](#) describes it (1965, pp. 305-306; 1977, 2nd ed., pp. 418-19).

Since 1968, excavations have made possible the rediscovery both of the small church of the fourth century and the great basilica of the fifth (Debono, 1971, pp. 191-220).

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## **Archaeology**

Of the former major monastery of the cenobites of Pachomius, only a few remains of the church have so far been brought to light by excavations. The church was built of stone and fired bricks, and its position was always clearly defined by the once tall [granite](#) columns that were part of it and that now lie together on the ground. Most of the remaining monastery buildings were probably built of sun-dried mud bricks. Because they were situated in what is today fertile farming land, we may be almost certain that they were plowed into the ground centuries ago. However, farmers cultivating the neighboring fields occasionally find building remains of fired bricks and when a new canal was dug in the northwest of the actual village, ruins of brick buildings were exposed. Some of them are still visible today.

In the precincts of the church, three successive building phases can be distinguished. Of the oldest one, which is also the smallest, only a few sections of the northern and eastern walls could be made visible. Traces of stylobates indicate that this church had several aisles, probably five. There was, however, no original apse at the eastern end. The existing apse is obviously a later addition and was simply built of crude bricks. On

the basis of pottery finds and its low position this church can be identified with the monastery of Pachomius (before A.D. 346), mentioned in the Coptic Lives of Pachomius.

At the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century a new church was built whose ground plan has been established as a five-aisled basilica. It has a remarkably narrow nave in relation to the inner side aisles. Another unusual feature is the way in which the outer aisles and the return aisles at the eastern and western ends form a kind of ambulatory surrounding the three inner aisles on four sides. The sanctuary consists of a slightly pointed semicircular apse with rooms arranged on both sides.

Again, after more than half a century the existing church was replaced by a much larger new building. It has the same five-aisle ground plan, with an apse and several side chambers. The tall [granite](#) column shafts covering the ground belong to this church. They are remnants reused from Roman buildings of the third and early fourth centuries. Only the capitals, of which two examples were found in 1989, were newly manufactured for this. This church, like the preceding one, has only a relatively narrow nave and very narrow outer aisles forming on four sides a kind of ambulatory around the three inner aisles.

This particular layout enhances the character of the church as a spectacular example of a great hall church supporting a large community of monks. The sanctuary is covered by modern houses. Only the two side chambers to the north of the apse could be made visible through excavation. In front of the western entrances to the church, there was a narrow colonnaded portica. The large church could have been built in the second half of the fifth century. The ceremonial dedication of a church on 11 November 459 in the monastery of [Pbow](#) is referred to in a text (ed. Lantschoot, 1934, pp. 13-56) known as a sermon of TIMOTHY II of Alexandria and with some justification may be connected with this building.

With the decline in the monastery's importance from the sixth century onward, the great church fell slowly into disrepair. In the front section of the northern side aisle, several additional structures have been found, which may point to the loss of the roof. Based on a statement by ABU AL-MAKARIM, it is generally accepted that al-Hakim (996-1021) destroyed the building. It is highly questionable, however, that the building remained in use for so long. If there is a historical core to this note, it is more likely to be that al-Hakim plundered a building that was already in a ruined state.

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