

PILGRIMAGES

There are more than sixty centers of Coptic pilgrimage in Egypt, of which the main ones are those of the Virgin Mary at Musturud, Saint Menas at Maryut, Saint George (Mar Jirjis) of Mit Damsis, Sitt Dimyanah near Bilqas, and Anba Shinudah at Dayr al-Abyad, near Suhaj.

For the Copts, pilgrimage is a religious act of public worship of high spiritual and social value, consisting of an act of veneration offered directly to God and his saints, or to God through his saints. In contrast to abstinence, fasting, and almsgiving, which are simple acts of corporal asceticism or charity, pilgrimage is a complex event. It implies, in effect, bodily fatigue, asceticism, and often a vow, with an offering being made and the poor receiving their share of alms. In short, pilgrimage is a religious act, perfect and complete, and if made with pure and righteous intent, it is a means of sanctification and glorification of God and his saints.

While the private and public usefulness and the sanctity of pilgrimage are evident, yet at all times and in all countries, it has been abused. Such abuses have been denounced by responsible spiritual people, like the monk SHENUTE, who, in the fifth century, accused the pilgrimages of being commercial fairs and sites of fun and leisure.

The Length and Dates of the Pilgrimages

Most pilgrimages last seven days, unless they coincide with a liturgical season, such as the feast of Ascension or the Fast of the Virgin. The last day of the pilgrimage, that of the saint's feastday, is particularly celebrated. The last night, that of the vigil, is called "the Great Night," and on this night, no one sleeps and the pilgrims remain in the church where the ceremonies unfold or visit the many public tents erected around the church on the occasion for various activities.

Certain very popular pilgrimages are not held on the saint's liturgical feastday, as is the case with Saint George of Mit Damsis or the numerous pilgrimages concurrent with the Ascension.

The Seven Specific Aspects of a Pilgrimage

Seven specific activities manifest the religious aspect of the Coptic pilgrimage: special prayer, baptisms, vows, offerings, and gatherings of the poor, the sick, and the possessed.

1. *Special* During the pilgrimage, many pilgrims present themselves before the icon of the Virgin or before the tomb, relics, or icon of the venerated saint, where they perform a *tamjid*, or song of praise, accompanied by the rhythmic clanging of cymbals.
2. There is great activity around the baptistry of the church during the pilgrimage, for many of the faithful have vowed to have their children baptized in this or that place in honor of a particular saint. Baptized and then confirmed, the children are carried in procession to the church, where they receive Holy Communion.
3. *Vows*. People often go on a pilgrimage as the result of a vow made during a sickness or other ordeal or to give thanks for a favor granted during the year.
4. *Offering*. It is often as a result of a vow that the faithful take offerings to the church that is the object of their pilgrimage: money, candles, oil, incense, icons, chandeliers, veils for the altar or the doors of the iconostasis, rugs, or the like. The most typical offering, however, is a sheep, which is slain near the church and divided into three parts—one for the church, one for the poor, and one for the family.
5. *Gathering of the poor*. Numerous poor people crowd into the centers of pilgrimage, where they receive part of the offerings of the slain sheep and alms. Among these poor, there are groups from orphanages that animate the activities by their boisterousness.
6. *Gathering of the sick*. Many of those who are sick or possessed by demons go to the centers of pilgrimage, hoping to be delivered from

their sufferings. They spend the night in the church awaiting the apparition of the saint, who will cure them.

7. *Gathering of the possessed.* Within the church itself, or in a room specially reserved for this purpose, exorcisms take place in certain centers of pilgrimage. Here many curious, mysterious, and impressive events have been verified.

The Secular Aspect of the Pilgrimage

It is the secular aspect of the Coptic pilgrimage that is often the most striking. During the day, and particularly at night, crowds fill restaurants, cafes, and theaters that have all been erected for the occasion under immense tents of motley color and design around the church or monastery of pilgrimage. In the evening, this village of tents is illuminated by gas lamps, and here the pilgrim can find everything—bakers, grocers, sugarcane vendors, and peddlers of religious objects and saints' images, with all kinds of ahjibahs (singular hijab, a protective talisman). Some specialists do tattoos, while other shopkeepers sell hummus and halawah (confections and sweetmeats), and cooks offer kabab or *fasikh*, a small fermented fish that is one of the specialties of the pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage occupies an important place in the religious and social life of the Christians in Egypt. Places of pilgrimage are like oases of prayer and joy in the daily life of the Copts.

Famous Pilgrimages

- **24 January (16 Tubah):** Al-Amir Tadrus (Saint Theodorus) of Madinat Habu, Luxor. The pilgrimage takes place in a church dedicated to the martyr Tadrus al-Muharib, the soldier.
- **29 January (21 Tubah):** The mother of the [Savior](#) at JABAL AL-TAYR. Rising over the eastern bank of the river Nile opposite the village of al-Bayahu in the neighborhood of the town of Samalut,

Jabal al-Tayr is associated with the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt, and the Virgin Mary is highly venerated in a church partly hewn in the mountainside. An inscription inside the church dated A.D. 328 confirms the fact that the church was constructed by order of Saint Helena, mother of Emperor CONSTANTINE I. In bygone days, a monastery of Our Lady stood on that mountain, and its monks welcomed the pilgrims who came to venerate the Virgin Mary.

Its church was restored in 1938. Though the monastery is deserted at present, al-Maqrizi wrote that in the fifteenth century the monastery was still flourishing, with numerous monks residing therein. He called the mountain Jabal al- Kahf (Mountain of the Cavern). Vansleb visited that monastery in February 1673 and called it *Dair il Baccar* (probably a corruption of *buqir*, a migrating bird mentioned by al-Maqrizi, which went to this mountain once every year).

Jabal al-Tayr has another church built in 1889, one dedicated to Saint MACARIUS the EGYPTIAN.

Pilgrims used to visit the mountain every year to venerate the mother of the [Savior](#) on the day of the anniversary of her death, according to Coptic tradition. The greater pilgrimage, however, was fixed for 16 Misra (22 August), when all persons possessed by evil spirits there sought deliverance through the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

- **2 April:** The Virgin Mary at Zaytun, Cairo (see VIRGIN, APPARITION OF THE).
- **20 May (12 Bashans):** Sitt Dimyanah, near Bilqas, in the Monastery of al-Barari is located in Za'faran, a few miles from Bilqas in Daqahliyyah Province in the Delta. Her father, a governor of Za'faran, built a convent for her in the area. She was followed there by forty other virgins (see DAYR SITT DIMYANAH). She and her forty companions were martyred under DIOCLETIAN. Her pilgrimage is one of the most important for the Copts.

- **30 May (23 Ba'unah):** Apa Nob of Samannud. Apa Nob came from Nahisah in the Daqahliyyah Province. He embraced Christianity early and became a martyr under Diocletian in the town of Samannud. Two celebrations take place in his honor, a pilgrimage on 30 May and a commemoration on 31 July.
- **19 June (12 Ba'unah):** Al-Malak Mika'il of Sibirbay. This pilgrimage is dedicated to the archangel Michael. It occurs in a little village called Sibirbay, east of Tanta in the Delta.
- **22 June (15 Ba'unah):** Mar Mina, Maryut. A martyr under Diocletian, Saint Menas was miraculously buried at Maryut (see ABU MINA). The site has been famous since the third century. Pilgrims flock there to collect water from its source. The water is believed to have curative powers. In the fifth century a large basilica and a large pilgrimage center was built at Maryut.
- **28 June (21 Ba'unah):** The Virgin Mary at DAYR AL- MUHARRAQ. Jabal Qusqam is the ancient Apollinopolis Parva, situated about 8 miles (13 km) west of the town of al-Qusiyyah, the final station in the progress of the Holy Family into Upper Egypt. This is the site of Dayr Jabal Qusqam, better known as Dayr al- Muharraq, established in honor of the Virgin Mary and in commemoration of the flight of the Holy Family. It is said that the monastery was founded by Saint PACHOMIUS (d. 348) or one of his disciples. The Church of Our Lady within its precincts is presumably the earliest known Christian church in Egypt. It is said that in 390 the twenty-third patriarch of Alexandria, THEOPHILUS (385-412), went to this monastery to consecrate the church himself; the anniversary of that consecration is annually celebrated in the Coptic liturgy on 6 Hatur (15 November).
- **14 July (7 Abib):** Saint SHENUTE, founder of the monastery bearing his name. DAYR ANBA SHINUDAH, also known as the White Monastery, lies near the city of Suhaj on the west bank of the Nile, opposite Akhmim. Anba Shinudah, who was born around 348, is said to have lived 118 years. He was a contemporary of Saint Paul the

Theban, Saint Antony, Saint Pachomius, and many other famous men. He lived to see seven patriarchs, from ATHANASIUS the Apostolic (326-373) to TIMOTHY II (458-480). His pilgrimage is one of the most popular in Upper Egypt.

- **15 July (8 Abib):** Anba Bishoi at Wadi al-Natrun. Many pilgrims return to Dayr Anba Bishoi to venerate the great ascetic of the desert of SCETIS. Anba Bishoi was born around 320 perhaps at the village of SHANASHA. He became a monk in 340 and died in the desert at [ANTINOOPOLIS](#) in 417, at the age of ninety-seven. He was buried at the monastery that bears his name.
- **7-22 August (1-16 Misra):** The Virgin Mary at Musturud. Musturud is a village situated north of Cairo on the road to Ismailia or Mit Surad. It is known to have been on the route of the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, and from very early times, it had a church dedicated to Our Lady. Among its recorded features is a well with miraculous healing water and an ancient icon on gazelle hide representing the entry of the Holy Family in Egypt.

The Dominican traveler and pilgrim J. M. VANSLEB visited it on 16 July 1671 and mentioned among its spiritual treasures a miraculous icon of the Holy Virgin. The church of Musturud has a crypt similar to that of Saint Sergius (see BABYLON), where the Holy Family took refuge during its flight. Annual pilgrimages to this church are performed on 7-8 Ba'unah/14-15 June. After spending the night in prayer at that church and celebrating the eucharistic liturgy in the morning, pilgrims proceed to the old sycamore tree at Matariyyah (see below), where the Holy Family rested to complete their pilgrimage cycle. The date of 8 Baunah was selected for the festive occasion because, according to the Coptic Synaxarion, the church was consecrated on that date in A.M. 901/A.D. 1185 by MARK III, seventy-third patriarch of Alexandria. As a rule, the pilgrimage to the Musturud church takes place during the fast of Our Lady (1-16 Misra/7-22 August) before the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin.

- **7-22 August (1-16 Misra):** the Virgin Mary at DAYR DURUNKAH, a center of concentrated religious activity for the Coptic community, situated about 6 miles (10 km) southwest of the city of Asyut. It is better known for the monastery bearing that name. Dayr Durunkah is the residence of the Coptic archbishop of Asyut. This is a highly frequented religious center, especially during the fifteen-day period of the Virgin's fast preceding the celebration of her feast on 16 Misra (22 August). The Catholic Copts have constructed a special church of their own honoring Our Lady for their own pilgrims.

Al-MAQRIZI, the fifteenth-century Arab historian of the Copts, enumerated several monasteries in the region of Adrunkah, as he called it. He described it as the most Christian area in Upper Egypt. He also noted that the population of that district still used the Coptic language in its daily life. The cluster of convents in the Durunkah region is a significant indication of the strength of the Coptic community in Asyut and the adjacent regions, such as Abu Tij and al-Badari, among other cities of Upper Egypt.

- **20-22 August (14-16 Misra):** the Virgin Mary at Daqadus, situated slightly north of the town of Mt Ghamr in Daqahliyyah Province on the east bank of the Damietta branch of the Nile. This village has a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It is built on the site of a much older one, which is known to have existed in 1239.

The antiquity of the older church is proved by citations in a manuscript of the church library (no. 27) dated A.M. 1048/A.D. 1332, and this has been confirmed by the excavations of 1970, which uncovered the foundations of the ancient structure under the modern choir. There is a tradition that the Holy Family in its flight into Egypt passed through that area. It is also known that the seventy-first patriarch, Anba MICHAEL V (1145-1146), was born in Daqadus. Its church appears in the medieval lists of churches and monasteries and is associated with the Virgin Mary, according to manuscript 174 of the National Library, Paris, where it is mentioned as

lyeotokoc ayoktoc (i.e., the [Mother of God](#) at Daqadus).

That village has become an important place of pilgrimage. Apparently the dates of these festivities are coordinated with those of the neighboring Mit Damsis festivities and Our Lady's annual fast of fifteen days in the month of August.

- **23-29 August (17-25 Misra):** Mar Jirjis (Saint George) at Mit Damsis, which is situated about six miles north of the town of Mit Ghamr on the eastern bank of the Damietta branch of the Nile in Daqahliyyah Province. Two churches dedicated to Saint George exist within a monastic establishment built on an attractive site on the Nile bank. The monastery was originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary when a barge, it is said, arrived with pilgrims from Jerusalem at that site and was unable to proceed further. The pilgrims were accorded hospitality by the monks, and during the night, their superior had a vision of Saint George, who revealed to him that the barge carried on it a relic of the saint and asked him to bring it ashore and build a church in his honor around it. The vision was confirmed the following morning by the discovery of a wooden reliquary containing the said relic, which was deposited in the sanctuary of the new church. It was constructed by order of Saint Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, about the year 320. Until the end of the twelfth century, Mit Damsis was known to have been the seat of a bishop, and according to the chronicle of JOHN OF NIKIOU, that village played a distinctive role in the opposition to the ARAB CONQUEST OF EGYPT in 642.

The modern church is known to date from 1880. As the INCENSE fills the church in the evenings during festivities, the image of Saint George on horseback is said to appear in the cupola. At that time, both Christian and Muslim pilgrims throng the church seeking the curing of diseases and especially the exorcism of evil spirits from possessed persons by prayers said by local priests.

- **23-29 August (17-25 Misra):** Sitt Rifqah at SUNBAT, a small village situated on the west bank of the Damietta branch of the Nile Delta, north of the town of Zifta, facing Mit Damsis in Gharbiyyah Province. It has an ancient church containing the relics of a Coptic woman saint by the name of Sitt Rifqah and those of her five children, originally natives of QUS in Upper Egypt, who were martyred at Shubra, near Alexandria. Afterward, their relics were transported to Sunbat, where they were deposited in its church.

Two other saints are also venerated at Sunbat, two brothers by the names of Piroou and Athom (see MARTYRS), who, after collecting the relics of another saint and martyr called Anua, priest of Xoïs (the modern Sakha), and depositing them in the same church at Sunbat, went themselves to Alexandria in pursuit of the crown of martyrdom.

Usually pilgrims to Daqadus and Mit Damsis cross the Nile to Sunbat to pay homage to Sitt Rifqah and other saints.

Other Pilgrimages, According to Sites of Churches, Saints, and Martyrs

- **Abnub.** An important city in the midst of agricultural terrain in the valley of the Nile in Upper Egypt, it is situated within 5 miles (8 km) of a [Coptic monastery](#) dedicated to SAINT BUQTUR (Victor) Shu. This saint was a Roman legionary and was martyred in the persecution of DIOCLETIAN. His pilgrimage takes place on 8-9 Bashans/16-17 May.
- **Abu Tij.** One of the noted Coptic districts in Upper Egypt, Abu Tij has a very ancient church dedicated to Saint Macarius the Egyptian built in the midst of the city necropolis. It attracts numerous pilgrims to venerate the great saint on his feast day, 27 Baramhat/5 April. The city appeared in the lists of episcopal dioceses of Upper Egypt and is still the seat of a bishop. Vansleb went there in the seventeenth century and visited the ruins of the ancient city near the bank of the

Nile.

- **Al-Badari.** This is a city in the province of Asyut in whose neighborhood a monastery existed by the name of DAYR AL-'AWANAH, dedicated to Saint George. It attracts a great many pilgrims seeking the miracle of his intercession. Al-'Awanah itself is a village that in ancient times had a population of Coptic origin. At present, it is a totally Muslim community. Another Pachomian monastery, deserted for centuries, existed at the village of Tasa (see DAYR TASA). It is situated 3 miles (5 km) north of al-Badari.

In the fifteenth century in his Coptic history, al-Maqrizi stated that on the anniversary of the Virgin Mary, a dove descended on the church sanctuary and then disappeared, only to reappear at the following annual festival.

- **Bani Murr.** A village situated on the east bank of the Nile in the region of the Abnub district in Upper Egypt, Bani Murr has a church that is dedicated to Saint George and is a renowned center for exorcism. Sick pilgrims frequent it for their deliverance on the date of its anniversary, 23 Baramudah/1 May.

In bygone days a monastery also dedicated to Saint George stood within the precincts of an adjacent village called al- Mu'aysirah, now called al-Ma'sarah. This monastery is now completely deserted, and in the fifteenth century, the historian al- Maqrizi included it in his list and added that it was already depleted of monks.

Bani Murr has been made famous in modern times as the native village of President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

- **Al-Batanun.** A small village situated to the northeast of Shibin al-Kom, capital of Minufiyyah Province, it has a church dedicated to Saint Sarabamun built in 1897 and frequented by pilgrims on 28 Hatur/7 December. The saint was bishop of Nikiou in the fourth

century and earned the crown of martyrdom. From al-Batanun came the fifty-fifth patriarch, Anba Sanutius I (SHENUTE I, 858-880).

- **Bayad al-Nasara.** This is a small place situated on the eastern bank of the Nile in Upper Egypt facing the town of Bani Suef. It has a monastery dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and its modern church was consecrated in 1963. Pilgrims frequent it during the fifteen-day fast of the Virgin Mary, 1-16 Misra/7-22 August.
- **Bayahu.** A church dedicated to Saint Iskhiron in the village of Bayahu became the object of annual pilgrimages to venerate one of the most famous Coptic saints and martyrs. Saint Iskhiron came originally from the city of QALLIN in the lower Delta, not far from Alexandria; hence, he is called in the Arabic annals Abiskharun al-Qallini. Churches dedicated to him include a fourteenth-century one in the Dayr Anba Maqar and Dayr Anba Bishoi both in Wadi al-Natrun. Apparently he was a legionary in a Roman battalion stationed at Antinoopolis (the Arabic Ansina) in Middle Egypt, but he is said to have been martyred at Asyut. His martyrdom is recounted by EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA in his *Historia ecclesiastica* (see Bk. 6, chap. 42). He was tortured by having his belly pierced with a sharp stake and then being decapitated. The Coptic church commemorates his martyrdom on 7 Ba'unah/14 June, and the consecration of his church at Bayahu is celebrated on 10 Baramhat/19 March.
- **Dimiqrat.** This is a village located between Luxor and Isna. On the western side of it, there is DAYR MAR JIRJIS, which is frequented by pilgrims for a week every year, 1-7 Hatur/10-16 November.
- **Hijazah.** This village is situated to the southeast of Qus. In its neighborhood there is a monastery known as DAYR ABU SAYFAYN, dedicated to Saint Mercurius. According to local tradition, the church inside that monastery was established by Saint Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine. Pilgrims frequent this monastery annually on 25 Abib/1 August to venerate Saint Mercurius.
- **Ishaq al-Hurini, Saint.** Few specific facts are known about this saint, who, according to the citation in the Coptic Synaxarion, was

born at a village called Hurin. After taking the monastic vow, he is said to have become a [disciple](#) of a certain Anba Iliyya. Afterward he went to the mountain of Barnuj on the edge of the Nitrian valley, and there he became the disciple of a certain Anba Zacharias. When he died, his body was placed on a camel and carried to a spot between Hurin, his birthplace, and another by the name of Nashrat.

As the camel refused to budge from that spot, the saint's body was removed and buried there. Over his tomb was erected a church that became a place of pilgrimage for the natives. He is also associated with DAYR AL-NAQLUN in the Fayyum.

- ***Ishnin al-Nasara***. This is a village situated in the region of the district of Maghagha in Minya Province. The Holy Family passed into this region on its flight into Egypt. About 5 miles (8 km) west of Ishnin or Ashnin, DAYR AL-JARNUS was built in honor of the Virgin Mary, whom people came to venerate on 24 Bashans/1 June every year. Al-Maqrizi mentioned the name of a monastery of Isus, which he identified as the Monastery of Argenus (probably a corruption of al-Jarnus). He recorded that there was in that place a well whose cover was lifted at the sixth hour (i.e., at midday) to observe the rising water within it, which indicated the height of the future flood of the Nile. [On June 1](#), pilgrims throng al-Jarnus Monastery with their children for the purpose of blessing them with immunity against the sting of a scorpion or a snakebite.
- ***Isna***. An important city in Qina Province in Upper Egypt, this was known as Latopolis in the Coptic period. It is said that as early as the reign of Patriarch PETER I (302-311), Saint Ammonius was created bishop of the city by him. Tradition has it that as bishop, Saint Ammonius established the church of the martyrs of ISNA with the aid of Saint Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, in what was known as DAYR AL-SHUHADA' situated a couple of miles south of Isna. Pilgrims frequent it on 14 Kiyahk/23 December. This monastery was visited in 1668 by a Capuchin named Father Portais, who reiterated

the role of Saint Helena in the founding of the monastery.

- **'Izbawiyyah.** This church of Our Lady and some of its adjacent buildings located in Cairo belong to DAYR AL-SURYAN in Wadi al-Natrun, in Cairo. The church itself was built in the nineteenth century on the site of a well at which the Holy Family is supposed to have stopped on its flight into Egypt. This is in the heart of the Azbakiyyah area, within reach of the old Cathedral of Saint Mark. Visitors throng that church every day to venerate an ancient icon of the Virgin Mary, presumably painted by Saint Luke the Evangelist. J. Muysier suggested that this may be an eighteenth-century copy of an original preserved in Dayr al-Suryan; it may be the work of a certain Luke who was bishop of the Thebaid in the fourth century. Muysier stated that Luke left a treatise in which he referred to his icons of the Virgin Mary.
- **Kafr Ayyub.** This is a village in the neighborhood of Minya al-Qamh in Sharqiyyah Province. Its church was established in 1900 and dedicated to Saint George, whose annual celebrations last a whole week every year, 18-25 July (Viaud, 1979, p. 74).
- **Kafr al-Dayr.** This is a village in the neighborhood of the district of Minya al-Qamh in Sharqiyyah Province. It has one of the oldest churches surviving in Lower Egypt. Its iconostasis is dated A.M. 1247/A.D. 1531. It is dedicated to Saint Michael, and its annual pilgrimage is fixed on 12 Ba'unah/19 June. Though ancient and built in Byzantine-Oriental style, its belfry was constructed in 1935 on the model of the church existing in Jaffa.
- **Ma'adi. Ma'adi,** a suburb south of Cairo on the Nile, has a church of Our Lady on the right bank of the river at the spot where tradition says that the Holy Family crossed to the other bank in its progress into Upper Egypt. This picturesque church, with its three granary-shaped cupolas, is an eighteenth-century structure on the site of a much older church. Usually pilgrims frequent it during the fifteen-day fast of the Virgin Mary before the feast of the Assumption on 16 Misra/22 August every year.

- **Manyal Shihah.** This place is situated southwest of Giza on the western bank of the Nile. Here, according to the Coptic Synaxarion, two saints by the name of [COSMAS](#) AND DAMIAN, presumably of Syrian origin, were martyred, together with five brothers and their mother during the [persecutions](#) of Diocletian. Those two saints are among the most popular ones throughout Christendom. The Copts celebrate their anniversary on three different dates of the Coptic calendar. The first date is 22 Hatur/1 December, which is supposed to be that of their martyrdom. The second, 22 Ba'unah/29 May, and the third, 30 Hatur/9 December, are thought to be the dates of the founding and the dedication of their church. The pilgrimage of Manyal Shihah is usually given as 20-22 Ba'unah/27-29 May, when visitors throng the church with their sick, seeking miraculous healing, mainly of epilepsy and nervous disorders. Both saints were physicians who treated patients with those conditions. According to al-Maqrizi, a monastery known as Dayr Damwah at Giza was described as "dayr Latif" (fine monastery).
- **Matariyyah.** This suburb northeast of Cairo is perhaps the most celebrated station in the story of the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. Here stands the sycamore tree which is supposed to have sheltered the Holy Family. It is said that a well existed in that region from which the Virgin drew water. Also the records indicate that a church stood on that site, but it disappeared in one of the recurrent popular upheavals against Christians and was replaced by a simple hall with an altar consisting of a stone table standing in front of a niche. In 1597 it became the property of the Franciscan friars, who restored the chapel, but in 1660 it was transformed into a mosque. VANSLEB indicated that when he visited Matariyyah on 12 July 1672, the oratory was no longer readily accessible to the Christians.

In 1724, Paul Lucas offered witness that the oratory still existed. In the nineteenth century the building disappeared altogether and pilgrimages ceased to take place. A small chapel owned by the Jesuit fathers was

consecrated in the adjoining garden on 6 December 1904, and the Catholics of Egypt organize a pilgrims progress to it every year on 8 December.

- ***al-Minshah***. This is the modern name of the older village known in the Coptic period as [Ptolemais](#)-Hermiou. It is situated about 12 miles (19 km) south of the city of Suhaj. Its fame rests on its association with Anba Bisadah, its bishop, and the monastery that carried his name. Tradition says that in his youth, Saint Bisadah was a shepherd of a flock of goats with a certain Agrippides, who turned out later to be the emperor of Rome under the name of Diocletian. However, Anba Bisadah was martyred by his old companion, Emperor Diocletian, and his relics were deposited in a small side chapel by the sanctuary of his church.

He is commemorated three times annually, and each time attracts pilgrims to his church. The dates are 27 Kiyahk/5 January, 24 Tubah/1 February, and 27 Abib/3 August.

- ***Minya al-Qamh***. A church dedicated to Saint George was built at Minya al-Qamh in 1916. Pilgrimage to it was started as late as 1968, but the natives claim numerous miracles performed by the intercession of Saint George, especially in exorcism, through the prayers of one of its deacons.
- ***Qamulah***. This is a village situated south of the city of Qus.

Meinardus placed Dayr Abu Sayfayn in it, and Muysen stated that it had an ancient church dedicated to Saint Michael.

- ***Qasr al-Sayyad***. This village is situated on the eastern bank of the Nile between Nag Hammadi and Faw or Pbow. The Monastery of Anba Balamun, or PALAEMON, is located in this area and is also known as the Monastery of Abu Sayfayn. It contains five churches, dedicated to Saint Mercurius, to the Virgin Mary, to Sitt Dimyanah,

to Saint Michael, and to Anba Balamun. The last was constructed in 1925.

Anba Balamun was the spiritual father of Saint PACHOMIUS.

In 323, Pachomius established his first cenobitic monastery of Tabennese in Chenoboskion, which may be identified as the modern Qasr al-Sayyad. Later his monasteries multiplied in that area. A Pachomian cathedral in ruins is being excavated by an American expedition at the present time, and a search is being conducted for the exact site of the discovery of the Gnostic papyri of the Nag Hammadi library.

Pilgrimages are made annually by the faithful to the Monastery of Anba Balamun on 30 Tubah/7 February and 25 Abib/1 August to venerate the founder of cenobitic life.

- ***Sadamant***. This town is now known as Sadamant al-Jabal. It is situated about 17 miles (27 km) south of Madinat al-Fayyum within the frontier of the province of Bani Suef. It contained an ancient monastery, Dayr Mar Jirjis. It was well known in the thirteenth century, and its name was immortalized by the famous theologian BUTRUS AL-SIDMANTI, whose work was published around 1260.

In the fifteenth century, al-Maqrizi said that it was almost deserted. However, it was restored in 1914 and monastic life was renewed there.

- ***al-Salamuni***. This is a village situated north of the better-known village of al-Hawawish in the district of Akhmim. It had in its neighborhood a monastery dedicated to the archangel Michael, DAYR AL-MALAK MIKHA'IL, which appeared in al-Maqrizi's history in the fifteenth century as Dayr Sabrah, a word derived from an Arab tribe called Bani Sabrah that settled in this region. The church of that ancient monastery, which still exists, is the site of two pilgrimages, on 12 Hatur/21 November and 12 Ba'unah/19 June. The natives

usually congregate in the church for tendering wishes from the saint.

- ***al-Sanquriyyah***. This village is situated approximately 14 miles (22 km) south of the town of Bani Mazar in Asyut Province. It has a monastery, DAYR AL-SANQURIYYAH, dedicated to Saint Theodorus, or Tawadrus, better known as al-Amir Tadrus or Tadrus al-Shutbi from his native village of Shutbi in the neighborhood of the city of Asyut. He was martyred at Alexandria sometime in the early years of the fourth century, and his body was carried back to his native village. The anniversary of his martyrdom is celebrated annually on 20 Abb/27 July and the translation of his relics to Shutbi on 5 Hatur/14 November.
- ***Sawadah***. This is a village situated at the foot of a mountain about a couple of miles to the south opposite al-Minya on the eastern bank of the Nile. Here will be found the vestiges of a monastery known as Dayr Sawadah or DAYR APA HOR.

[Apa Hor](#) was born in Siryaqus, a village near the town of Shibin al-Qanatir in Qalyubiyah Province in Lower Egypt. He is said to have gone to Pelusium (al-Farama) in the Sinai Peninsula to confess his faith before the authorities, who transported him to Antinoopolis, where he was tortured and ultimately decapitated.

Al-Maqrizi mentioned this monastery in the fifteenth century and contended that it received the name Sawadah from an Arab tribe that became established in that area and ended by destroying it.

Pilgrims used to visit that monastery to venerate [Apa Hor](#) on 12 Abib/19 July.

Shaqalqil. Situated on the side of the mountain east of the Nile, opposite Umm al-Qusur, in the neighborhood of the town of Manfalut in Upper Egypt, Shaqalqil became the site of a monastery dedicated to Saint Menas. Its ancient church is partly hewn into the mountain rock. Vansleb, the seventeenth-century traveler, noted the existence of that monastery,

but failed to identify it. Earlier, in the fifteenth century, al-Maqrizi recorded it as the Monastery of the Grotto of Shaqalqil (Dayr Magharat Shaqalqil) and described it as a charming site on the flank of the mountain and hewn into the rock. It is inaccessible by normal foot travel; visitors can reach it only by scaling the mountainside with a rope. Owing to its rugged approach, few pilgrims made the journey to it to venerate Saint Menas on his anniversary date of 18 Ba'unah/22 June.

- **Sidfa.** This is a village situated a little to the south of the important city of Abu Tij. It attracts pilgrims to its church to honor Anba Bishoi toward the end of the fast of the apostles. The saint's anniversary occurs on 12 Abib/19 July. Anba Bishoi appears in the Sidfa tradition as the uncle of Saint Shenute the Great. Actually his uncle is known to be Apa Pjol, the founder of the White Monastery in Suhaj. The fact that Apa Pjol was little known in that village accounts for the possible substitution of a more renowned saint in the person of Anba Bishoi. In 1673, Vansleb visited what he described as "the ruins of the ancient town of Sitfe." The ninety-fourth patriarch of Alexandria, JOHN XIII (1484-1524) was a native of Sidfa.
- **Sanhira.** Situated a little to the southwest of the town of Tukh in Qalyubiyyah Province, Sanhira had a church dedicated to an early saint and martyr by the name of Philotheus. His sanctuary became a place of pilgrimage for natives who were bitten by rabid dogs and used the water from a well within its precincts as a cure.
- **Siryacus.** Occasionally called Saryacus, this village is situated a little to the southeast of al-Khankah in Qalyubiyyah Province. Until some time in the later Middle Ages, it had a monastery dedicated to an early Coptic saint and martyr by the name of Apa Hor. The sanctuary of the church that has survived from that vanished monastic institution has long been a place of pilgrimage for the natives of the region. As a rule, pilgrims thronged to his sanctuary for the saint's healing power over the disease known as scrofula.
- **Tukh al-Nasara.** A small town in the neighborhood of Shibin al-Kom,

capital of Minufiyyah Province. It has three churches, one of which is dedicated to Saint GEORGE, constructed in 770. Of the remaining two, the older church of Our Lady is known to have existed in 726; it was restored in 1872. The other church, also dedicated to the Virgin Mary and dating from 1876, is the seat of the superior of Dayr al-Baramus in Wadi al-Natrun, which owns property in this area. Two patriarchs of Alexandria came from this town, MATTHEW III, also known as Matta al-Tukhi, and JOHN XVI.

- **Tukh Tanbisha.** A village in the neighborhood of the town of Quisna in Minufiyyah Province, Tukh Tanbisha has a church dedicated to the archangel Michael, which is frequented by pilgrims on 12 Ba'unah/19 June.

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