

Recent Excavations at Bawit

The remains of the Bawit monastery, founded by Apa Apollo, are located near Dashlout, about twenty-five kilometers south of Hermopolis (today Ashmunayn).^[1] The *kom* covers an area of forty hectares. Apa Apollo's monastery was one of the most important monasteries of Middle Egypt and the site of Bawit has indubitably yielded the richest papyrological and epigraphical documentation in the region.^[2]

The Monastery of Bawit has been identified with that of Apa Apollo by both Walter Crum and Jean Cledat (Cledat 1902: 525—31). According to chapter 8 of the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, Apollo founded his monastery around 386—88.^[3] Although tradition has placed the foundation of Apa Apollo's monastery at the end of the fourth century, no archaeological evidence has come to light to confirm this dating.

The oldest remains discovered on the site so far go back to the end of the sixth century, while the written documentation and the majority of monuments show that the monastery reached its peak during the seventh and eighth centuries.

Furthermore, inscriptions attest to the existence of the monastery until the tenth century (Benazeth 2008: 406; Calament, in press), and according to the surface pottery, the site was deserted toward the end of the eleventh century or the beginning of the twelfth century.^[4] At that time the monastery was no longer in operation and there was a cemetery in the eastern part of the site.^[5]

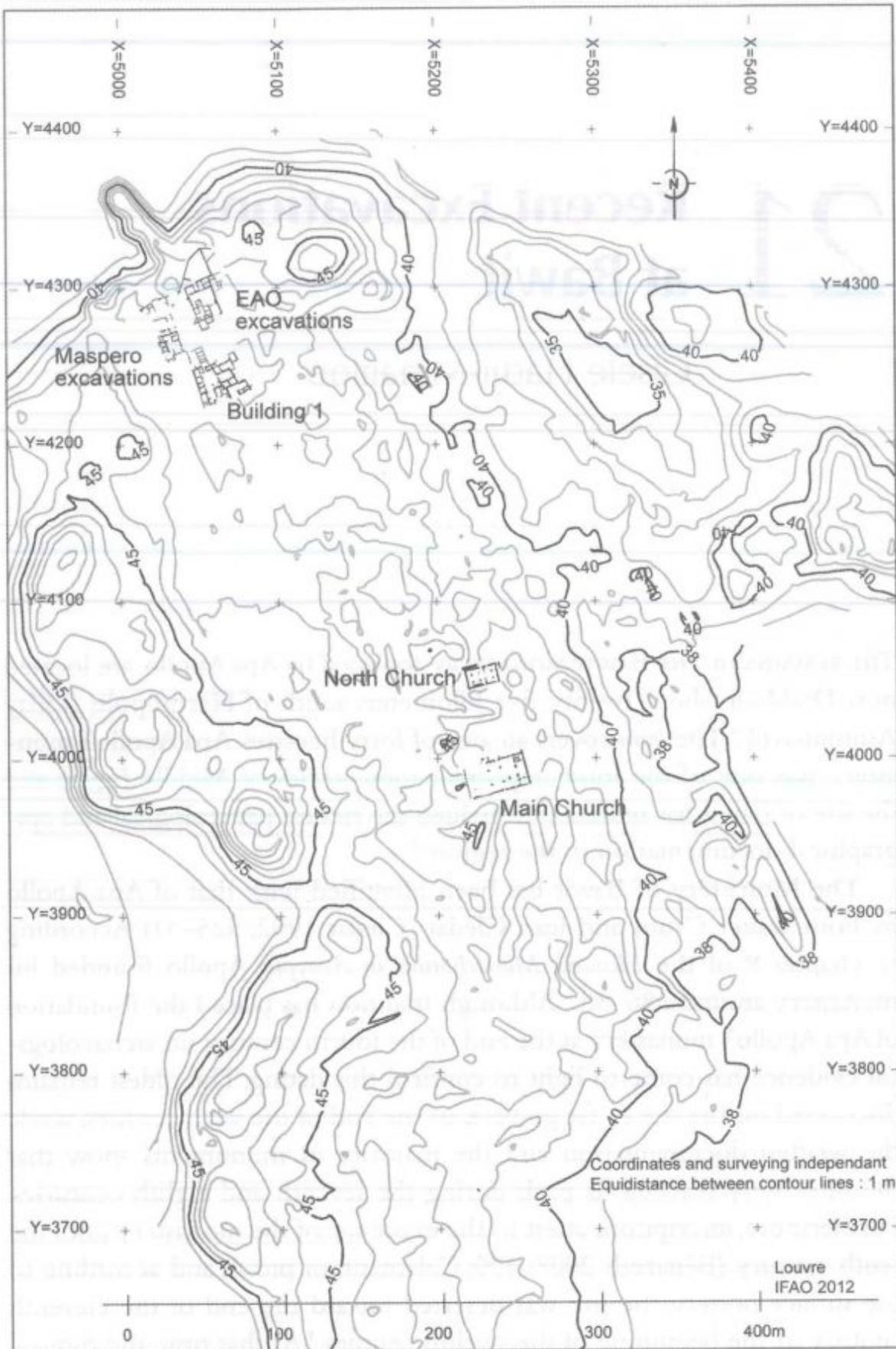


Fig. 21.1. Topographical map of Korn Bawit. © Louvre Museum/IFAO.

The Former Excavations

Jean Cledat was the first scholar to visit Bawit. Resident at the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology (Institut fran[^]ais d'archeologie orientale [IFAO]), he was then working at the nearby necropolis of Meir, about fifteen kilometers south of Bawit.

After a survey of the site at the beginning of 1901, assisted by [Emile Chassinat](#) and Charles Palanque,[\[6\]](#) he started an official dig for the IFAO at the end of the same year. He worked at Bawit until 1905 and unearthed many constructions, most of them scattered in the northern half of the *kom*. Among Cledat's discoveries are the two churches known as "Eglise nord" (North Church) and "Eglise sud" (South Church), both located in the central area of the site.[\[7\]](#)

After an interruption of seven years, in 1913 the excavations started again under the supervision of Jean Maspero, then an IFAO resident (Maspero 1931-43). After Maspero's death, in 1915, the site was abandoned to its fate and was gradually covered over by the wind-blown sand.

The discoveries of both Cledat and Maspero have been located again thanks to the magnetic survey of the site carried out by Tomasz Herbich in 2004-2007.[\[8\]](#) Except for limited excavations by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization in 1976 and 1984–85,[\[9\]](#) the *kom* was deserted until 2002, when the joint mission of the IFAO and the Louvre Museum undertook new field research at Bawit.

The Sectors of the Current Excavations (fig. 21.1)[\[10\]](#)

Since work resumed, the dig has taken place in two sectors: in the northern and the central parts of the *kom*. At the northern sector a

dwelling quarter has been discovered, and in the central part the North Church has been unearthed again.[\[11\]](#) South of it, a new church, without any doubt the main church of the monastery, was discovered and has been in the process of being excavated since 2008.

The Dwellings of the Northern Area

In 2003–2004, three trenches were dug in the northern part, near the buildings discovered by Jean Maspero and by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization (Boutros and Rutschowskaya 2005). One of the trenches, sondage 3, has been widened and has revealed dwellings of which only one, Building 1, has been unearthed.

Building 1 (fig. 21.2) belongs to a large block, the extent of which is unknown. Dated to the first half of the seventh century, Building 1 consists of several rooms surrounding a courtyard. On the western side of the courtyard are four rooms that do not communicate with each other: the entrance to Building 1 is on the southernmost side of these four rooms. On the northern side of the courtyard, two rooms stand on either side of a corridor [leading](#) to a kitchen and storerooms.

The courtyard was delimited to the south by a wall that separated Building 1 from its neighbor. This wall has been destroyed and we do not know if there was any communicating door there. On the eastern side of the courtyard is a complex of five vaulted rooms. This complex is composed of a large (9 x 5.35 m) rectangular central room (S.7) from which one has access to the four other rooms, almost square in plan. These rooms are symmetrically set, two by two, to the north (S.1 and S.2) and the south (S.8 and S.9) of the largest room.

The walls and the vault of room S.7 were decorated with paintings. A large part of the vault collapsed after the building was abandoned, pulling down the west wall toward the interior of the room. The paintings preserved on the vault were cleared from 2005 to 2007 (Rutschowskaya

2010a),[\[12\]](#) and the west wall, almost completely destroyed, was cleared in 2012 (fig. 21.3).

It was decorated with three niches: one in the middle and two smaller ones on the south side of the wall. The central niche was once flanked by two columns, of which only the stone bases are now preserved. In this niche was originally painted the image of Christ in majesty, surrounded by seraphs and the four evangelists.

In the next niche was represented a saint of whom only the lower part of the body can be seen. On the north side of the wall, north of the central niche, were represented the Magi. The central niche was flanked by two wooden sculptures that were originally embedded in the wall. These elements were found in the rubble. One of them, which was on the south side, represents the Archangel Michael and the other, which was on the north, represents the Archangel Gabriel.[\[13\]](#)

They were both sculpted from one single piece of wood, cut lengthwise. A certain Victor, either sculptor or painter, has affixed his name on one side of the piece that represents Gabriel.



Fig. 21.2. Plan of Building 1. © Louvre Museum/IFAO, R. Boutros, and G. Hadji-Minaglou.



Fig. 21.3. Bawit, Building 1, the eastern wall of S.7, seen from the west. © Louvre Museum/IFAO, M. Perraud.

The Main Church (figs. 21.4 and 21.5)

When Cledat excavated the South Church, he also uncovered, to the south of it, a part of a room that he named with the letter D (Chassinat 1911: pl. VII). This room, in fact, is the naos of a large basilica, which appears to be, without any doubt, the main church of the monastery.

The basilica has three aisles. The walls are made of kilned bricks, with an external facing of limestone blocks. The limestone blocks have been left bare, while the internal brick facing was plastered with a lime rendering and a whitewash that has disappeared almost everywhere. Traces of color and inscriptions can be seen where the whitewash has been preserved.

The many fragments of coating found in the sand covering the ruins show that the interior of the whole building was decorated with paintings.

From the sand have also been collected carved elements of architecture, broken into pieces: epistyles, friezes, capitals, and jambs. These fragments, together with the large pick marks in the walls, are to a large extent the result of the work of the *sebakhin*.

The *sebakh* consisted of decomposed mud brick, a material rich in nitrates, which provided an excellent agricultural fertilizer. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, farmers were allowed to collect this material from ancient mounds and, as [elsewhere](#) in Egypt, they were very active at Bawit (Palanque 1906:1-14, pl. II).

Nevertheless, some limestone blocks and [shafts](#) of the column, also thrown into the sand, have obviously been cut up to be used in the lime kiln that was lying on the surface of the *kom*, some meters south of the church (Hadji-Minaglou 2012:133, fig. 84).

The excavation of the basilica began in 2008 and now progresses from east to west. At the present time, the sanctuary and a large part of the naos have been uncovered. [\[14\]](#) As a whole, the width of the building meters on the eastern side and 20.7 meters on the west. The length is 39.6 meters.

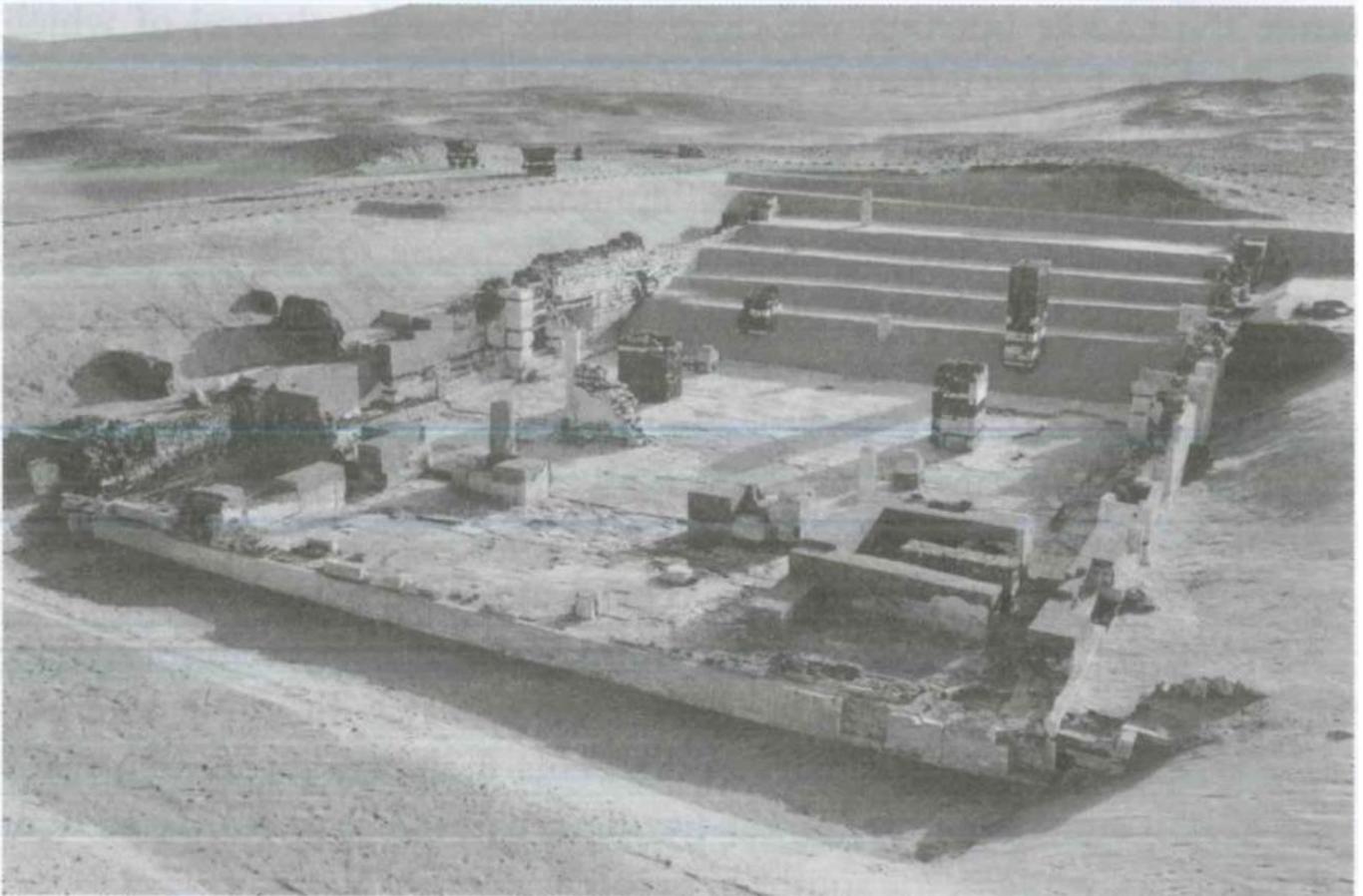


Fig. 21.4. Bawit, the main church, seen from the northeast. © Louvre Museum/ I FAO, G. Poncet.

The naos is divided into three aisles and the sanctuary into three sections with the bema in the middle. The narthex, if there is one, has not yet been uncovered. The plan, as it appears today, is the result of many alterations.

The sanctuary covers a surface area of 21.2 by 7.15 meters. The external facing of the eastern wall of the sanctuary is flat. There, nothing shows the position of the bema, while the position of each lateral chamber was marked by a shallow quadrangular niche. The northern niche is clearly delimited by the limestone blocks of the masonry, and the position of the southern niche has been determined thanks to the remains of its wooden base.

In the central part of the bema, the bases of two small columns indicate the position of the altar. Behind these bases, two jambs, 4.9 meters apart,

are built in the eastern wall and delimit a square niche that takes the place of the apse.

The jambs might have supported arches, which were also leaning on the west wall of the bema. Another rectangular and smaller niche is situated in the southeast corner of the room. This was originally flanked by two small columns. There is no symmetrical niche in the northeast corner of the room, but instead, a door [leading](#) to the north lateral chamber. In the western wall of the bema are three openings leading to the nave: the northern and the southern ones were closed by wooden doors,

while the middle opening was closed with a wooden chancel of which only the base has been found, completely rotten and pulverized. The pavement of the bema is made of limestone slabs with some elements of white marble. It is divided into two areas different in width, the eastern part raised about twenty-five centimeters above the western one.

Originally, the pavement of the bema was all at one level and the heightening of the eastern part is the result of repair work. At the emplacement of the altar, the two preserved bases have been included in the new pavement and, underneath, the imprint of the slabs of the previous pavement can be seen. The western part of the pavement has also been repaired, the central slabs having been replaced with fragments of stones and bricks installed without care.

The south lateral chamber has not undergone any major transformation: apparently, the level of the floor, simply made of clay with a lime covering, is the original one. To the north of the bema is an area divided into two parts almost equal in the surface. In the northern part is a chamber, paved with kilned bricks, while in the southern part is a staircase.

The stairs lead to the gallery if there was one, which would have extended over the northern aisle, or to the roof. Usually, this staircase is

located in the western part of the church, and the fact that it is in the east and in the sanctuary makes it particularly notable.

In three other basilicas located in Middle Egypt, the staircase is also established in the eastern part of the building. In the church of the south cemetery of Antinoopolis, the stairs are at the north extremity of the sanctuary and start in the nave. At the southeast church of Dayr al-Bala'iza, the staircase is situated north of the northern lateral chamber, from where it has its access. At the White Monastery in Sohag, the stairs are established north of the triconch and have two entries, one from the sanctuary and one from the nave (Grossmann 2002: figs. 55,148, and 150).

The naos is divided into three aisles. The nave meters wide and the side aisles are each 4.75 meters in width. The east-to-west interaxial distance between two columns meters. The monolithic columns and their bases stood on pedestals of kilned bricks. Not all of the columns are preserved and only four pairs have been exactly located. The position of the pair closest to the sanctuary is known thanks to the trace of its pedestal under the stone pavement.

The next pair, which is located five meters from the western wall of the sanctuary, is the best-preserved: the pedestal and the stone base of both columns are visible and half of the broken southern column is still standing. The third pair has been incorporated into L-shaped pillars. The pedestal and base of the southern column of the fourth pair are still in position, while only the trace of the pedestal of the northern column is visible.

A fifth pair of columns may have been incorporated in two rectangular pillars, which have not yet been completely uncovered. The L-shaped pillars have no foundation and rest directly on the pavement of the naos. The naos had three entrances to the north aisle and one to the south. The northwest entrance is the best preserved. It was flanked by two engaged

columns on the outside and by two pillars on the inside. The south entrance was once closed off by a wall made of several courses of kilned bricks alternating with a course of reused limestone blocks.

The same type of implementation has been used for the masonry of the pillars of the nave. The blocking up of the south door and the masonry of the pillars are contemporary with the reconstruction of part of the south wall of the church. The original wall had probably fallen after an earthquake.

Like the pillar and the blocked door masonry, the wall was built with reused material. Most of the blocks have been placed on their edge and many have painted inscriptions on them. One of these inscriptions bears the date 625 and five others the date 632. All these inscriptions are contemporary and commemorate the same event. They allow us to date the rebuilding of the wall to the beginning of the seventh century.

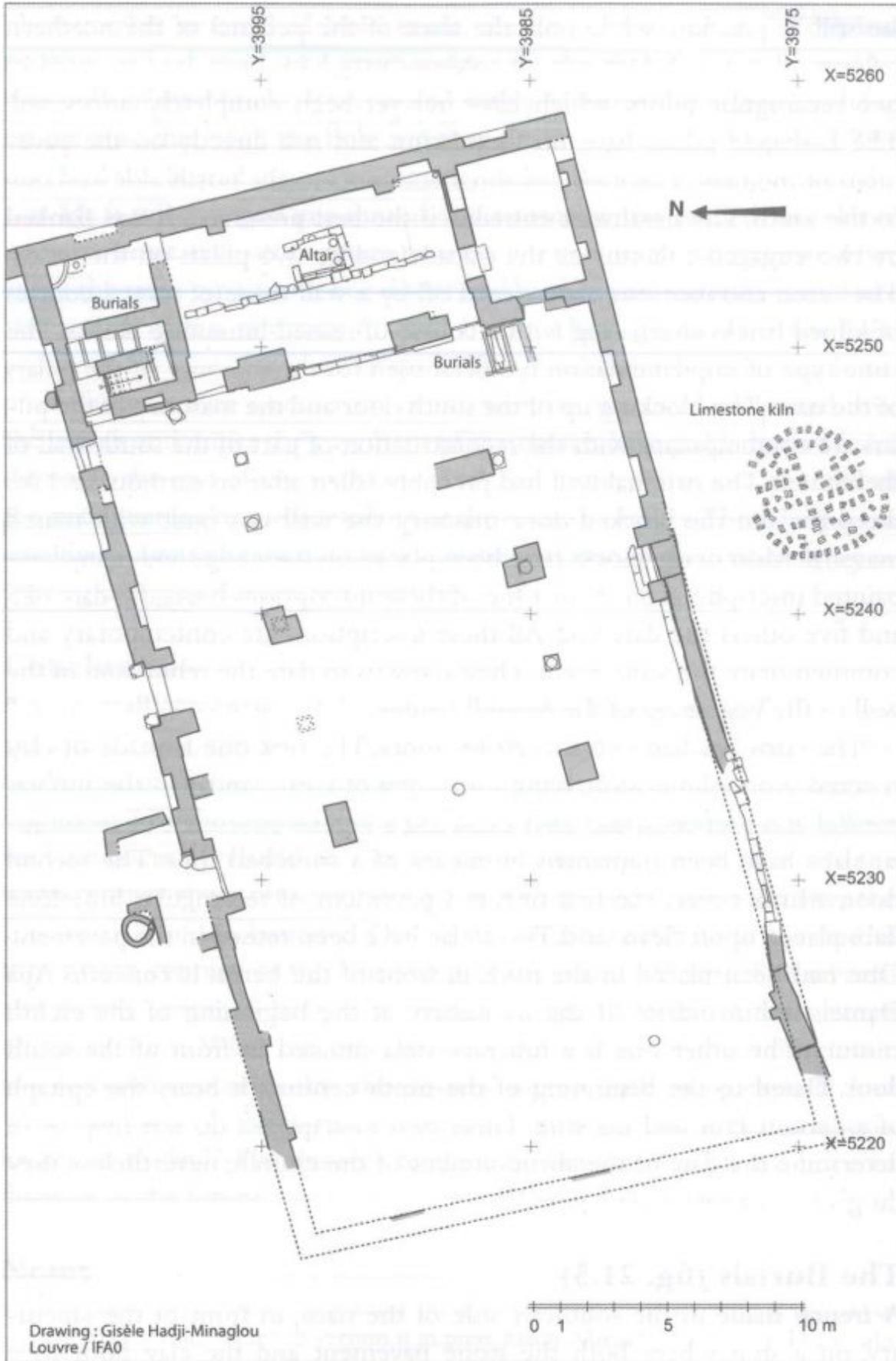


Fig. 21.5. Bawit, plan of the main church. © Louvre Museum/IFAO, G. Hadji-Minaglou.

The naos has had two successive floors. The first one is made of clay, covered with a lime wash, lying on a layer of clean sand. On the surface, parallel and perpendicular lines imitating a regular pavement of rectangular slabs have been imprinted by means of a stretched rope. The second floor, which covers the first one, is a pavement of rectangular limestone slabs placed upon clean sand.

Two stelae have been reused in the pavement. One had been placed in the nave, in front of the bema: it concerns Apa Daniel, archimandrite of the monastery at the beginning of the eighth century. The other one is a funerary stela situated in front of the south door. Dated to the beginning of the ninth century, it bears the epitaph of a certain Hor and his wife. These two inscriptions do not help us to determine the date of the abandonment of the church; nevertheless, they do give us a *terminus post quem*.[\[15\]](#)

The Burials (fig. 21.5)

A trench made in the southern aisle of the naos, in front of the sanctuary, on a spot where both the stone pavement and the clay floor have disappeared, has revealed the presence of burials underneath the church. One grave has been emptied of the sand covering the corpse. After the photographic record had been made, the corpse was left in its original position and reburied. The grave is dug into the rock and is delimited by thin walls of mud bricks.

It was sealed with a pavement of mud bricks lying on the sand that filled the hole and then covered with smoothed clay. The deceased was buried in a west-east orientation, the face looking toward the east. He is still wrapped in a shroud, and a coin, by now eroded, was placed upon his heart. Five other graves have been found under the staircase. They are of

the same type as the one discovered in the southern aisle.

They were also sealed with a covering of mud bricks. These graves have not been excavated because of the lack of space. The graves show that the church was probably built over a cemetery. In the staircase, the layers excavated over the burials and under the pavement of the church have yielded some coins dating to the end of the sixth century^[16] and pottery dating to the end of the sixth century or the beginning of the seventh century.

These help us to date the construction of the basilica to the very end of the sixth century or the beginning of the seventh century.

Conclusion

A very small percentage of the *kom* of Bawit has been excavated. The most ancient remains, the South Church and the main basilica, go back to the beginning of the seventh century. The seventh century in its entirety is represented by the constructions in the northern area.

In the main basilica we have traces of rebuilding and refurbishment until the beginning of the ninth century, the most important phase having taken place soon after the construction of the building. The North Church was built at the end of the seventh century or the beginning of the eighth century. The seventh and eighth centuries have also yielded a large majority of the written documentation.

What can be said about the vestiges of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries that the pottery survey leads us to expect? And what can be said about the late fourth-century remains that tradition invites us to find? The answers to these questions are what we hope to discover in the future.

Gisele Hadji-Minaglou

[1] The results of the Bawit excavations presented here are those achieved at the end of the 2012 season. A French version is in press: Hadji-Minaglou, in press a. The results of the 2013 season will be presented in Hadji-Minaglou, in press b. I am grateful to Vivienne G. Callender who has kindly revised my English.

[2] The reference papyrological bibliography is given in Wipszycka 2009: 86-87.

[3] For the Greek text, see Festugiere 1961: 46-71; for the French translation, see Festugiere 1964: 46-63, especially 48,1. 36: commentaire. An English translation is available in Russell 1981: 70—79.

[4] The results of this survey are not yet published. For the moment, the results of the survey in the hermitages situated over the cliff, at the west of the *kom*, are presented in Marchand et al., forthcoming.

[5] A burial has been discovered over the main church (Benazeth 2007: 282), and, in the same area, the disrupted surface layers contained human remains such as bones and clothes.

[6] [Emile Chassinat](#) was then director and Charles Palanque resident at the IFAO.

[7] The 1901 and 1902 seasons are published in Cledat 1904—1906; the 1903 to 1905 seasons are partly presented in Cledat 1916 and Cledat 1999.

[8] The located buildings appear in dark blue in the topographical map of the site, published in Benazeth and Herbich 2008.

[9] The results of these excavations have not been published. Nevertheless, a general publication including the discoveries made at Bawit has been announced: Abdal- Tawab and Grossmann, forthcoming.

[10] The topographical map of figure 21.1 has been drawn up by students of the Ecole Supérieure des Géomètres Topographes du Mans: J. Boerez and S. Griffet (2003), and T. Touze and J. Sarret (2006 and 2007). I have simplified the map and completed it with the vestiges brought to light since 2008. The remains excavated by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization in 1976 and 1984 have also been added. I thank [Peter Grossmann](#) for the plan he has kindly given me.

[11] The North Church was excavated by [Emile Chassinat](#) and Charles Palanque in 1902 and remained unpublished. In 2003-2005, it was cleared again by Dominique Benazeth and Jean-Luc Bovot. The [manuscript](#) of the publication presenting the works is near completion: Benazeth, forthcoming. At the moment, one can find a brief description of the building in Pantalacci 2005: 441, and a plan in Lyon-Caen 2010:33, fig. 2.

[12] Only the lower part of the vault is preserved and a large part of the paintings has fallen into the rubble, with the rest of the vault. The fragments of painting have been collected and the reconstitution of the scenes is still in progress.

[13] The two pieces are now exhibited in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, where they are registered under numbers 12816 and 12821: see Rutschowskaya 2010b and Rutschowskaya 2013.

[14] The results obtained from 2008 to 2010 are presented in Hadji-Minaglou 2008, Hadji-Minaglou 2009, and Hadji-Minaglou 2010. No excavations took place in 2011. The report concerning the 2012 season is in Hadji-Minaglou 2012.

[15] The inscriptions on the south wall and the stelae reused in the pavement are being studied by Florence Calament: see Calament, in press.

[16] I wish to thank Professor Olivier Picard for his details about the dating of the coins found in the main basilica.

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