

## **REFECTORY**

*“table of the brethren,”* a standard element of monastery architecture, especially in cenobite monasticism, the room in which the monks took their common meals. According to the oldest examples so far identified in Egypt (Grossmann, 1982, pp. 162-63), the monks did not sit at long tables as is the custom today. Instead, they sat on benches arranged in the form of a circle, just as the Egyptian country folk still do during their work breaks in the fields. In the same way, the couches for the ancient meals for the dead, such as are found at al-Bagawat (Grossmann, 1982, pp. 78-79), are arranged in a semicircle. The seating arrangement of the meal described in the [Coptic life](#) of Shenute of Atrib during his stay in Constantinople (Amélineau, 1888, p. 43, fol. 48v) may not have been very different.

In order to accommodate as many such rings of seats as possible in one room, the refectories in [Egypt](#) were built with several aisles. The individual aisles were of equal width, and one ring of seats was provided for each of the bays formed by the columns. Most refectories contain two or three aisles. The largest examples so far identified in Egypt are the two refectories of DAYR AL-BALAY'ZAH, which both have three aisles. The refectories in the great Pachomian monasteries were probably similar.

Very small refectories have only a single pillar standing in the middle of the room; the room is divided by [arches](#) thrown across to the four sides into four bays of roughly equal size (e.g., the present [chapel](#) of Mar [Jirjis](#) at DAYR [ANBA](#) BISHOI; cf. Evelyn-White, 1933, Vol. 3, pp. 161-62; DAYR AL-BARAMUS, the actual “monastic henhouse”; and Qasr al-Wizz). In the late Fatimid period, a middle-sized type was developed with four pillars and nine symmetrically arranged bays (e.g., DAYR AL-FAKHURI at Isna and Dayr [Anba](#) Bishoi in Wadi al-Natrun; cf. Evelyn-White, 1933, Vol. 3, p. 165, where this is described as “a large and nearly square building”).

The rings of seats were in several cases built of bricks. In the refectory of

DAYR [ANBA](#) HADRA, they were distributed remarkably irregularly. The equipment of the refectory also included a water jug stand and, in later times, a lectern. In addition, the kitchen and storerooms were logically accommodated in the neighborhood of the refectory.

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**[PETER GROSSMANN](#)**

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