

**The Church of Sts. [Sergius](#) and Bacchus (OLD CAIRO)**

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THE CHURCH OF STS. [SERGIUS](#) AND BACCHUS (Abu Sarga) was founded in the late seventh century by Athanasius, scribe (katib) of 'Abd al-Aziz ibn Marwan, governor of Egypt from 685 to 705. Athanasius came from Edessa (Syria) where St. Sergius suffered martyrdom, a few days after his friend Bacchus was martyred.

Athanasius built a basilican church with a western return aisle, an apse with two side chambers, and galleries above the side aisles. The marble columns (and one of granite) separating the nave and side aisles have reused late-antique capitals. The ravages of time led to restorations and rebuilding. Although in general the initial plan has been preserved, only a few building elements are original. Almost immediately after the church was consecrated, it became an Episcopal church. From the seventh until the twelfth century, a number of patriarchs were elected in the church, and although clear evidence is lacking, patriarchs were most probably also consecrated here.




























The Church of Sts. [Sergius](#) and Bacchus became an important pilgrimage site. According to tradition, the [crypt](#) of the church is one of the places where the [Holy Family](#) stayed before traveling to Upper Egypt or back to Palestine. The oldest [sources](#) mentioning this resting place date to the twelfth or thirteenth century. Western pilgrims from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onward reported that they visited this locus sanctus. For them, the dwelling place of the Holy Family was the chief attraction, and the church is often simply called 'the Church of the Cave.' The architecture of the [crypt](#) can, most probably, be dated to this period. From the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, Franciscan fathers (who owned a hospice near the Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus) had the privilege of celebrating the liturgy in the crypt. For years it was inaccessible, completely flooded because of the high groundwater level of Old Cairo. A successful drainage and restoration project, recently

completed, has made it possible to visit this beloved pilgrimage site<sup>2</sup> again.

The restoration project yielded a surprise: in the apse of the southern altar room, part of a wall painting of Christ enthroned, surrounded by the Four Living Creatures, the sun and moon, and the archangels Michael and Gabriel was discovered. It might be dated to around 1200.

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