

UMM AL-BARAKAT (Tebtynis)

A site where numerous [Ptolemaic](#) to Byzantine papyri were found.

Ancient Tebtynis, situated on the southeastern edge of the Fayyum, belongs to the settlements that sprang up in the vicinity of a temple—in this case of the crocodile [deity](#) Suchos. The origins of the settlement probably reach back to the period of the Twelfth Dynasty. The settlement reached its peak development in the Ptolemaic-[Roman](#) period, the period to which the temple also belonged. The quarters laid out in the [Ptolemaic](#) period to the north of the temple, on both sides of the great processional way, have a system of street planning similar to that found in other Hellenistic towns in the eastern half of the Mediterranean. The Roman and late Roman quarters to the northeast are considerably more irregular. In late antiquity a military unit was established within the temple, a contributing factor in the settlement's continuation into the Christian period. A number of uniformly shaped rooms that belonged to the buildings where the soldiers were billeted are visible, chiefly along the western enclosure wall of the temple.

In the section of the town belonging to the late antique period three early Christian churches, all built on the lines of a basilica, were found. In each instance the buildings were extremely provincial, and their architectural embellishment was made up entirely of reused and even ill-matched working materials. None of the churches possessed an apse; they made do with more or less regular rectangular exedras. They can all be placed approximately in the seventh century.

Church A is three pillar-axes long. The very narrow central nave is bordered on the west end by two transverse brick pillars, beyond which lies the western return aisle. The three rooms of the sanctuary are separated from each other by double-arched passageways each with intermediate columns. In addition, both the side rooms are connected with the side aisle by arched windows, a feature that is unparalleled in

the early Christian architecture of Egypt. [Besides](#) that, only the south side room still features a connecting door to the south aisle.

Of church B only a few sections of the wall were visible, and these of no great height. Both rows of columns end in the west in angular columns built with fired bricks. The [contiguous](#) transverse arch nearby on the south side is from a later date. Finally, most unusual is the division of rooms in the sanctuary with a large central room reaching on both sides beyond the width of the middle aisle.

Church C is the best preserved of the three churches and is especially renowned for its fine interior paintings, parts of which are today in the Coptic Museum, Cairo (Jarry, 1968, pp. 139-42). The church appears to have had a later narthex added on externally. The sanctuary is [constructed](#) asymmetrically with a south side room probably used as a [baptistry](#) and connected to the central main room by a broad arch.

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