

# **Monasteries of Wadi al-Natrun as a destination of the Holy Family Journey**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose behind this paper is to focus on the religious, historical and monumental importance for the Journey of the Holy Family to Egypt in general and to the sites of the Journey in particular in Tourist Guidance field as not addressed by anyone from this point in previous studies.

This paper therefore is designed to highlight the extent of the validity of the occurrence of this Journey, and it's a historical event not to doubt in it . Also to focus on the impact of the falling of the Holy Family in the reconstruction of the places they went through as the desert around Wadi El- Natrun , became filled with monastic settlement, and Later , many monasteries, in spiritual commemoration of the Holy Family's passage through the Valley.

## **Introduction of Wādī ḥ - Natrûn :**

Egypt had hosted lots of prophets like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the tribes of the Israelites, Moses the prophet and Jeremiah the prophet, but the greatest blessing, which Egypt received, was when the Lord Jesus came to Egypt with his mother the Holy Virgin Mary and stayed in it, it will be a great spiritual holiday if we visited the holy places bless by holy family , will visit some of the sites on the route the Holy Family took on their journey through Egypt connecting the past with the present, one of these sites was Wadi al Natrun .

Wadi El Natrun is one of the prime attractions for the Christian religious tourists that comes to Egypt, originally, also is considered one of the most famous valleys in Egypt. It is considered the home of asceticism and worship, with four monasteries still existing today .

The Holy family crossed the Rosetta branch of the Nile to the western delta, and headed south into Wadi El-Natroun (Natroun Valley, a.k.a. Scetis) in the Western desert of Egypt. Before reaching Wadi El-Natroun, the Holy Family passed through the spring of Al-Humra where the Infant Jesus caused a water spring to well up from the ground. The well is called "Beer Mariam" (Mary's well). In the earliest decades of Christianity, the desert around Wadi El-Natroun, became filled with monastic settlements, and later, many monasteries, in spiritual commemoration of the Holy Family's passage through the Valley. According to tradition the Virgin Mary and her son the child Jesus Christ, hid in that valley during their trip to Egypt, and Jesus Christ blessed the four directions of the valley. The Town which is nearest to the

desert of Scetis is Terenouti ( Al-Tarrana )m about 40 kilometers from the Monastery of St.Macarius.

The history of Wadi El Natrun and its importance to the Copts goes back to the 4th century. Anchorites inhabited caves around the valley and built monasteries. After the Arab invasion of Egypt , the Khalifa of Moslems in Arabia gave Christian monks in Egypt the amnesty to practice their religion. For that reason, the area became the official residence of the Coptic patriarch. Even now the patriarch is elected from Wadi El Natrun monks.

Later Christianity reached the area with St. Macarius the Great who retreated there in c.330. Other religious men were drawn to the area and a sort of loose community was formed, The community grew in number and became more organized, a flourishing monastic system was created.

### **Importance :**

The Wâdî n - Natrûn has a long history dating from pharaonic times. Caravans travelled from the Buhairah and Farâfrah oases to the Nile delta , passing the small oasis of Wâdî n - Natrûn. The famous group of papyri known as “ The Complaints of the peasant ” prove that in the early Middle Kingdom some of Farâfrah 's produce was taken via the Wâdî n - Natrûn to be sold at Heracleopolis. Recent discoveries of a black granite bust of a chancellor of the XVIIth Dynasty of Lower Egypt. a granite gateway, blocks from a lintel and jambs with cartouches of Amenemhet I, at Quarat ad-Dahr, and other remains, lead one to suppose that even in the year 2000 B.C This region was held sacred. The site in question is only five kilometres north-west of the Monastery of St. Macarius ( Abû Maqâr ).

According to Coptic tradition, the Desert of Scetis or the Wâdî n Natrûn has a Christian history going as far back as the visit of the Holy Family to Egypt. We read in the Synaxarium that , after visiting Basâtah and Munyat Samanûd , the family crossed the river to the west bank and then saw from afar the Gabel n - Natrûn. The Holy Virgin blessed it. Furthermore, some Christians escaped to the Desert of Scetis during the Diocletian persecution between 304 and 311.

Evelyn White devotes a whole chapter of his monumental work , The Monasteries of the Wâdî n - Natrûn , to the topography of the ancient monastic settlements in the western desert. Three localities west of the Delta are referred to by the early monastic fathers . In the latter part of the fourth century , Macarius the Alexandrian had four cells in the western desert. “One in Scete , the inner desert , one in Libya, one in the ‘Cells’, and one in Mount Nitria. Two of these were without windows, and in them he used to dwell in darkness during the Forty Days ' Fast, another was so narrow that he could not stretch out his legs , but another , wherein he used to receive the brethren was wide and spacious.” The mount of Nitria , where

nitrate was found, stood about forty- five kilometres north of the present Cairo – Alexandria route, or some fourteen kilometres south – west of Damanhûr, near al –Barnuji.

The Greek geographer Strabo ( born 63 B.C) accompanied the prefect of Egypt, Aelius Gallus, on his expedition to Upper Egypt in 25-24 B.C Strabo makes one of the earliest references to the area: “ Above Memphis are two nitre-beds, which contain very large quantities of nitre, and the Nitriote Nome. Here Serapis is held in honour and they are the only people who sacrifice a sheep.”

Though still in the desert the mountain was situated on the edge of the Delta. It is wrong to identify the present Wâdî n - Natrûn with the Mount of Nitria, and the latter was the first home of Christian asceticism. Palladius visited the monks living in Nitria in 391:“ Now having held converse with many of the saints, and having gone around among the monasteries which were nigh unto Alexandria for three years, and having met about two thousand of the great and strenuous men who lived there, and who were adorned with the excellence of spiritual lives, I departed from there and came to Mount Nitria. Now between this mountain and Alexandria there are a certain lake which is called ‘ Mareotis ’... Now in this mountain there are seven bakers who make bread and who minister unto them, and unto chosen men of the inner desert, of whom there are six hundred, and also unto the people of that mountain. ” This account suggests that some primitive form of communal fellowship existed among the monks of the Mount of Nitria.

The settlement referred to by the ancient authorities was called Cellia, situated south- west of the Mount of Nitria on the way to Scetis, the present Wâdî n - Natrûn. According to Palladius, this was where Macarius the Alexandrian lived: “ He was an elder in the place which is called the ‘Cells’ wherein I myself lived for nine years.” Another well- known monk who lived in Cellia was Issac of Cellia who is commemorated by the Coptic church on the 19<sup>th</sup> Bashons. Many monks must have inhabited this region and some form of hegemonic system observed as the following quotation shows:“And when they ( the monks) had come out to go to the Cells, the honorable men fell down before the priest of the Cells, and said unto him, ‘ Father, give our brothers orders to take us to see all the fathers.’”

Cellia was founded in about 335 In 1981 archaeologists from Geneva University uncovered large sections of Cellia, which extended over more than one hundred square kilometres, having five ‘hermitage towns’, thus confirming the preparatory work of Antonie Guillaumont and Rudolphe Kasser of the French Archaeological Institute in Cairo. Hermitages and cells were built of sun- dried sand bricks held together by mineral salts. Many of the oratories were adorned with polychrome wall- paintings of crosses and floral, vegetable and animal designs. Noteworthy is a painting of a beardless, youthful Christ with cross- nimbus. Over the centuries frugal hermitages gave way to a settlement of comfortable monastic apartments.

The glory of the Mount of Nitria passed a way after the fifth century, and what we know of its previous existence comes from the reports of visitors. Rufinus and Melania, and St. Jerome and Paula, are said to have visited Nitria, and their testimonies give us an insight into the ascetic lives of the fathers in that region. This settlement on the edge of the desert was easily accessible, yet its proximity to the outside world was the reason why it was abandoned. A similar fate befell Cellia. Only the most remote and isolated community survived.

### **Name:-**

- The area which will concern us has been known by a number of names :

### **In the Pharaonic era**

The oldest Egyptian term for the region, sh.t-p.t ( lake of Heaven ) occurs in the pyramid Texts number 76 & 63 ( approx. 2360-2160 B.C) as a place to produce incense taken from the text of the seven oases inscribed in The walls of the temple of Edfu. This temple was called in the reign of the Ptolemies “ Sekhet Hemam”, this mean “ salt field” due to the availability of Salt Nitrite.

It was known as “ Intet Hesmen” which exactly means “ Wadi Natrun”, The same name, "Sekhet Hemam" was also reported in the inscription found in the tombs of Bani Hassan which dates back to the Middle kingdom.

### **In the Greek and Roman era**

It is known that all geographic locations in Egypt, in that age, have two names, one Greek and the other Egyptian, Alexandria, for example, its ancient Egyptian name, but still in the language of old Coptic is " Rakoty", and so emerged the name " Natron" clearly in that age. Webster's Dictionary mentions the word Natron that it has entered into English, from Spanish, from Arabic, from the Greek word which is Natron  $\nu\alpha\tau\rho\nu$ .

The form Scetis ( with variations such as Scytis, Scythis ) is common in Latin, but Scitium ( with similar variations in MSS.) is generally used by Cassian and once (Scithium) by Rufinus in the *Historia monachorum* : the former also has the adjectival form Scitiotica (eremus).

The best – attested form in Greek is Σκήτις but a variety of other spellings occur in MSS., as Σκίτις, Σκε΄θις, Σκυθις, Σκήτης, Σκήτη; the form Σκητίον is found in a MS. of the *Historia monachorum*. The Σκι΄αθις of Ptolemy should probably be added to the list. An adjectival form Σκητιώτης, “ man of Scetis,” is occasionally found; and Ptolemy has the form Σκιθιακή ( χώρα).

It is sometimes supposed that Scetis is derived from the Greek ἀσκητής ;and an Arabic synonym for Scetis , El Askîṭ (الاسقيط) , is thought to furnish evidence of this . But the bilingual text of Abû l Barakât's great work equates الاسقيط with Πικκῶ (Sic)suggesting that El Askîṭ is a mere transcription of the Greek form Σκήτις , like the Syriac Êskîṭê . Scetis is but the Hellenized form of an Egyptian name , Shiêt , which is occasionally rendered ψηητ; but in the vast majority of instances ψηητ or ψηζητ ( once ψηζητ ). Quatremère points out that of these two forms ψηητ is consistently used in all earlier Mss. While ψηζητ is used only by later scribes , as in the thirteenth – century MS. of the Life of John Kame' . It should be added that in MSS. Of later date both forms are used indifferently . But it is probable that the ζ had been introduced into the pronunciation long before it appeared in writing ; for documents which preserve the form ψηητ , yet offer various attempts at derivation which agree in equating the second syllable with ζητ , “ heart ” In any case , we can say that in the Greco – Roman period , the name "Natron" emerged for the first time and commonly used as a general name for the area of the Valley of Natron as geographically known now , relative to the lakes of the Valley of Natron in it , and then known in the Coptic name of " Fabi Hosiem" This name was of course the oldest name for this region , geographically before other monastic names.

### **In the Byzantine era and the Coptic language :-**

The most popular of these derivation finds the origin of the name in the verb ψη ( properly “ to measure ” but used ad hoc in the sense of “to weigh” , and ζητ , “ heart ” :thus John the Little is bidden to go “ to the mountain ( desert ) of the natrûn (πτωσ μπιζοσεμ ) which is shiêt , the place where they weigh the hearts (εψηψηη ηπιζητ ) and thoughts with true judgment . The Arabic Mizân el Kulûb (ميزان القلب) or “ Balance of the Hearts” another name for Scetis, directly reproduces this etymology.

The fact that , despite alleged connection with ζητ , the form ψηητ is preferred in the earlier documents , seems to justify Amélineau in regarding the latter as more correct . It is perhaps significant that Sahidic writers , who might have been tempted to see in the second syllable the word ζητ , “ north ” keep the form ψηητ.

In the Christian era we have seen that the name of the place known now as Valley of Natron , was called in the Fourth century AD in the Coptic language as " Fabi Hosiem" ie; " mountain of Natron" Before the emergence of monasticism of Makkar , so as stated in the Coptic text of the biography of John the short . Thus this name was translated in the same sense into Arabic for the first time by Abu Albarakat ( 13 AD) into the mountain of Natron . Also, another word was mentioned in the Coptic texts which is " pei Hilos" ζολε , which literally means " swamps" and

so the literal translation of the name is "the swamps" , meaning " swamps of Natron" . Makrizy has used the phrase " Valley of Natron" , in his Arabic writings , and this name popularized in the " history of the patriarchs" in Arabic and is still in effect to this day.

### **From the Islamic conquest to the present:-**

In Arabic the name is commonly rendered شيهات ( usually transliterated Shîhât, but better Shîhêt , though once at least the spelling شيهيت Shihêt , is found the "h" being ( apparently ) never omitted. This suggests that the genius of the Arabic language necessitated the introduction of "h" .If this is the case , the Arabic use would seem to have influenced Coptic pronunciation , thus giving rise to the derivation set forth above, and ultimately to have vitiated the Coptic orthography also.

In the Muslim era , the region has been named using the translated name from the Coptic language. Which is the mountain of Natron then it was Called Wadi El Natron which is the common name now. This place which is known as Wadi El Natron currently has been named in early Arab Ages as " Valley of the Hbeb" , this name came in the book " History of patriarchs " also " Whbeb" .

Makrizy mentioned it was the " Valley of Hbeb" which is Valley of Natron known as desert of Shiheet ( Scetis) and desert of Al- Askeet and balance of hearts and has several monasteries and it was reported in Al- Antasar distorted as the Valley of Het from acts of the lake and respoted as well in Al- Tohfa distorted as the Valley of Hbit , said who was from a pasture of sheep and buffalo as the Bedouins in the past and recently from acts of the lake.

### **The Monastery of Saint Mcarius :-**

#### **(A) Location:-**

The Monastery of saint Macrius ( Dair Abu Maqar) is the southern most monastery in Wadi al – Natrun. It can be seen to the west from the Cairo-Alexandria desert highway about 129 kilometers from Cairo , or eighty- six from Alexandria . One reaches the monastery by turning into the desert at the road sign on the desert highway that points to the monastery **Fig:1,2** .

From a historical point of view , the Monastery of Saint Macarius is the Most interesting monastery in Wadi al- Natrun . It has supplied more patriarchs ( twenty nine ) than any other monastery.

#### **( B) Foundation :-**

The foundation of Dair Abu Maqar is closely associated with the life of saint Macarius the Great ( 300-90) . He was the son of a village priest . As a young boy he learned the Scriptures . As was the custom , his parents decided for him to be married , but saint Macarius avoided association with his wife , because of his high esteem for virginity . One day when he as working as a camel driver , Saint Macarius saw a vision of an angle who promised him that his followers would inhabit the desert to which he had taken the camels .

Later , he withdrew to the inner desert , where , at that time, no ascetics had settled. His first settlement was in the vicinity of the present Dair al – Baramus.

After the death of Saints Maximus and Domitius , Saint Macarius was led by an angle to a certain rock , and there he was told to build a church . This church , then , with the cells around it , formed the nucleus of the present monastery . In spite of the community that grew up around him , Saint Macarius remained an anchorite throughout his life . he used to live in one of the cells, which was connected by a tunnel to a small cave . After the death of Saint Macarius , Saint Paphnutius , who is described as possessing such knowledge that he could expound the scriptures without reading from them , became his undisputed successor.

### **(B) Description:-**

The monastery is entered from the western end of the northern wall. The churches of the monastery were restored several times throughout the centuries. The most interesting buildings are the old Church of St. Macarius and the Keep. The church of St. Macarius , which lies in the Monastery's northeast section , was originally larger than it is presently it was consecrated by patriarch Benjamin I . it has two sanctuaries: the southern is dedicated to St. Benjamin, and the northern to St. John the Babtist. **Fig:3.**

The Keep which dates from the late thirteenth century , is considered to be among the most interesting keeps of Coptic monasteries. It contains a number of chapels and a church , which was used in times of danger and of Siege . the keep has a basement and two stories **Fig:4.**

The monastery includes other buildings from different periods. The Church of St . Iskhirum houses the bodies of St. John the Little and the three saints named Macarius , since 1969 the monastery has been “ modernized” and many renovations have considerably changed its appearance.

### **The Monastery of the Syrians :-**

#### **(A) Location:-**

The Monastery of the Syrians ( Dair al- Syrian) is situated five hundred meters northwest of the monastery of saint Bishoi. Like the Monastery of Saint Bishoi , it is easily accessible. And is the smallest among the still inhabited monasteries of Wadi al natrun . Only in the modern period have extensive gardens been joined to the monastery , on it east side . **Fig :5,6.**

### **( B) Foundation :-**

The Monastery of the Syrians was founded in the Sixth century as a consequence of the Gaianite heresy . It was the duplicate of the Monastery of Saint Bishoi to which the Orthodox monks withdrew. To emphasize their orthodoxy at their new monastery , they retained the name of the patron saint and added to it the title of “ Theotokos” The name Theotokos, or “ God – bearer,” was derived from the importance with which the Orthodox monks regarded the doctrine of the Incarnation. The teachings of the Gaianites were considered by their opponents a Docetist heresy, which by denying the doctrine of the Incarnation , lowered the status of the Holy Virgin Mary . Thus, the Monastery of the Syrians was known as the Theotokos Monastery of Saint Bishoi.

### **( C) Impotance:-**

The Vigin St. Mary Monastery “ El- Surian” in Egypt Esckeeet ( Valley) is considered one of Theotokos ( The Lord Mother) had been established after Ephesians synod in 431 A.D. for the reason to confirm the dogmas of Theotokos which the orthodox believe in it against Nastour’s fake statement.

This is one of the four monasteries still functioning in Wadi al- Natrun ( the ancient desert of Scetis) southwest of the Nile Delta. In the earliest explicit reference that have survived ( in notes written into three Syriac manuscripts shortly after A.D 851) .

### **( D) Description:-**

The monastery proper , which is enclosed by a high wall possesses an east-west orientation in its main extension and is about 165 yards ( 150 m) long. The main entrance lies at the west end of the northern gridle wall . It leads immediately into a small court that is bounded on the north by the cloister wall and on the west and south by the jawsaq ( Keep) and its outer stairs built as the style of Roman forts was established by King Zeno ( 474-491A.D.) Towers spread to serve as refuge during the attacks of the Berber tribes living in the Northern parts of the desert and made occasional attacks on surrounding lands. **Fig:7**, A courtyard leads to the church of the Holy Virgin Mary , which dates to approximately 645. Adjoining this court is a larger court that includes a garden . A long the south side it s bordered by the al



'Adhra' church **Fig: 8** and by several monastic cells . To the west of the church lies the refectory , a door in the western wall of the virgin's church leads to the old refectory , the custom was that monks lived in isolation through the days of the weeks and meet on Saturday evenings at Church where they passed the night in discussion with their elders attending the midnight prayers Tasbeha ( Daily mid-night Hymens) no longer in use , and the kitchen belonging to it **Fig:9**, as well as a small courtyard that also extends to an area west of the jawsaq.

The other buildings are also situated right next to the wall . the central area is thereby left clear for passages and modest gardens . The row of cells along the north wall is interrupted by the church of Lady Mary ( al - Sitt Maryam ) **Fig:2** It was probably built before the eleventh century , the structure consists of a transverse room leading to a Khurus , which is followed by a sanctuary built in the fourteenth or fifteenth century . The relics of St. John Kame are preserved in a feretory at this church , To the east of St .Mary Church stands the big tree which was called St.Ephraim's Tree . it has also a very unique story tells ; when the Syrian Figure Father St. Ephraim El Soriany (308-373A.D) came to wadi El Natrun to visit his disciples , went to be blessed from the living Abbot of the entire Shiheet Valley; St. Bishoy the Great . But because St . Ephraim was weak in his body moves , got used to lean on a stick . out of respect to meet St. Bishoy the Great , gave his stick to one of the monks and told him to stick it into the earth.It soon took root and became the famous Tamarind tree which is still living with its girth till now .**Fig:-10**

A third church , that of Saint John is found at the far eastern end in the northeast corner of the monastery. This is a small single-aisled chapel that is no longer in use as such but instead now serves as a kitchen and storehouse . Along the south wall of the monastery several uniformly executed calls have been set up . A few steps to the east of the al-Adhra church a modern guesthouse has been constructed.

## **The Monastery of St. Pshoi:-**

### **(A) History:-**

The famous monastery stands about 2 miles (3Km) to the north of Dayr anba shinudah . As with Anba Shinudah, nothing remains but the church , which is built of red bricks and thus gives the monastery the popular nickname Dayr al Ahmar . It is not known if Anba Bishoi was the founder **Fig:11**.

The monastery of St. Pshoi, one of the four most ancient monasteries of Wadi al-Natrun , bears the name of its patron , who with his spiritual friend , John the little.

The Monastery of St. pshoi is one of the original monasteries of Scetis. Its counterpart-monastery is that of the Syrians, which was built in the sixth century by the followers of severus or the Theodosian monks.

## **(B) Architecture:-**

The monastery is nearly oblong in shape. A gateway near the western end of the north wall provides access. The gateway with its gate house is the most complete and elaborate of its kind in wadi al – Natrun .

The southern half of the monastery is occupied by the church and cells of the monks , as well as a modern patriarchal residence . The greater part of the gardens and the keep are in the northern half.

The most interesting building in the monastery is the tower . It dates from the thirteenth century . one enters it at first floor level by a draw bridge that rests on the roof of the gatehouse **Fig:12.**

The monastery possesses three refectories. The latest lies parallel to the west end of the main church , from which it is separated by a vaulted corridor . the two other refectories are of an older type.

## **The Monastery of Al- Baramus:-**

### **(A) History :-**

The Monastery of the Romans is the northernmost of the four remaining monasteries of wadi al-Natrun . The distance from the rest house to the monastery is approximately fourteen kilometers.

The current monastery of al-Baramus is significant for many reasons . It was founded on a site in front of the old Baramus monastery incorrectly known as “ the monastery of Moases the Black” .The present monastery is dedicated to the virgin of Baramus , and was probably founded in the late sixth century .

The grounds are surrounded by a huge enclosure wall and one enters through a small door on the wall’s eastern side. The Church of the Holy Virgin Mary , situated near the western side of the wall. is the main church of the monastery . the church is thus the oldest preserved in wadi al-Natrun . It is a basilica with a Narthex , a room preceding the sanctuary , which was added to the church , in a later period the columns of the church were placed by oblong pillars **Fig:13.**

To the north of the Church of the Virgin lies the Keep , called by the monks al – Qasr . It is the oldest keep in wadi al –Natrun and probably dates from the ninth century . The tower, entered at the first floor by way of drawbridge .The Keep was constructed over a well , which provided the monks with water in the case of a long siege. **Fig:14.**

## Conclusion

The visit of the holy family to the land of Egypt is an interesting story which the history recorded it for us in all its details Egypt has the right to be proud of all countries of the world because it's specialized for this great honor to be the visit of holy family in Egypt not to anyother country , the holy family remained in Egypt for almost three years and eleven months , they cut through at least two thousand kilometers was mostly on foot and others inside sailing on the great Nile across its land and people blessed them across Egypt.

Due to the outstanding location of Egypt it was a place of attraction and landing for many prophets and apostles and saints since ancient it's reminded in the Goly Bible "Blessed in Egypt My people" and in Qoran " let in peace safely"the land of Egypt was the shelter of the prophets, who embraced them and took refuge when narrowing the ground around them , so they came to it because of hunger sometimes and escape from death at other times . Prophet's father Ibrahim came to it and married Mrs Hagar and also Joseph when he was a guy and some of them born out, refines with all the wisdom of the the Egyptians such as prophet Moses who born raised and lived and in it's land and mountain he received sharia boards from his god and he took to him .

The advent of the prophets to Egypt was unmistakably thing to question Why God chose Egypt to be a refuge for the holy family ?

The obvious answer to blessed the land of Egypt by the coming of Jesus Christ and his mother virgin Mary and saint Joseph to it .

Egypt was known throughout its life that was submitted for tourists since that had Herodots visited in ancient history he registered his astonishment of its vast different from his country .

The advent of the Holy Family to Egypt was a great event in the history of mankind and God has chosen Egypt to be a refuge and safe shelter for the divine child and Protector of the eternal message Which was the illumination to guide this world and This is not uncommon in Egypt throughout the ages Was a refuge for many others, have embraced the prophets, Yusuf has received after his brothers sold him to the Ismailis, he lived in Pharaoh's palace until he reached the highest positions in Egypt ,Also has came father Jacob and his sons and raised in it the prophet Moses , In addition Egypt has remained a shelter for each of Fathers and prophets and kings and princes.

This great country who deserved to be pure country and sacred homeland , No less purity and holiness for the holy places in Palestine that Jesus Christ glory to him lived the greater part of his life in Palestine ,thus also his pure feet went on the land

of Egypt and he lived his childhood wandering with his mother virgin mary and saint joseph from one country to another .

And to Egypt has resorted Virgin Mary and jesus christ as a child they did a blessing historical trip in its territory the journey encountered several horrible obstacles and dangers either from the shortage of water or food ,marauders or spread of wild beasts ,or awe from the enemies specially

the attendants of the tyrant king Herod, from whom the family escaped because he was searching for catching the young child to destroy him.

The holy family follow the way to egypt entered it after passing through sinai desert at Farama or Pelusium, which stands between Al-Arish and port-Said . they came to the town of Basta , known today Tal-Basta near the city of Zagazig. No sooner has the holy child entered the town, that the idols and statues thereof collapsed before him, an event which exasperated the heathen priests and population of the town and they refused to accept the family tostay among them and ill-teated them agood personality of Tal-Basta advised the family to go to a village near the town where they found a tree , in the shade of which they stayed some days ,The place today is called as “ Al-Mahamah” .From ‘Al-Mahamah’ they left for Belbeis, From Belbeis, they departed for Meniet Genah, then to Samanoud , then to Burulus and then to Al-Mahallah, where they crossed the Nile to the western bank and there they stayed some days at Sakha, then they went westward, parallel to Wadi el Natrun .

They went to Ein-Sham, now called Al-Matariah , then the holy family headed southward to Babylon of old cairo , where they stayed for some time ,After that the transmission of the holy family from Babylon to Upper Egypt, then the family left upper Egypt in asailing boat, setting out from the spot where the present church of the holy virgin at Maadi lies, Then the holy family crossed to the eastern bank , where they stopped at Gabal El Tair “the mount of birds” near Samalout.From “Gebel El Tair” the family went to Ashmonein then they left Ashmonein to a village called Phyls, now Dyrout Monastery, they stayed for a few days, then left for old Qoussieh, called Qusqam, at that time they escaped to the village of”Mirah” where they took to the Qousqam mountain , on which the famous monastery of the Holy Virgin , known as,Al- Muharaq, now lies.

Nearly all the historical and ecclesiastical sources assert that Al- Muharraq Monastery was the last spot in Upper Egypt reached by the Holy family on their journey ,it is not improbable , however , that the holy family after receiving the order at qousqam Mountain, took a route that led a little further south, down to the Mountain of Asyut. Oral tradition claims and certifies that the holy family hid for some time in a cave in that moutain , which seems quite plausible considering that as refugees, they had grown accustomed to taking and following the unbeaten track and

heading for the shelter of caves and so from the heaven of Egypt , the Christ returned , in time to proclaim his message of love.

There are different opinions about how long the Holy Family To the land of Egypt some have been identified between two years , three and half and four years. And recently the German archaeologist “Geza” coptic Manuscript with coptic language (31.5cmx8.4cm ) she found it in one of the Libraries of the cologne in Germany date back to the 4th century Talk about the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Family in Egypt and identified the the duration of the Holy Family in Egypt four years.

There are comments came for Dr/Gawdat Gabra Coptic scholar This manuscript shows that the period of the existence of Jesus Christ with the Holy Family in Egypt was 4 years and this Opinion is likely to historians, researchers and archaeologists. In particular, it remained in Egypt until the death of tyrant Herod then returned to Palestine after his death .

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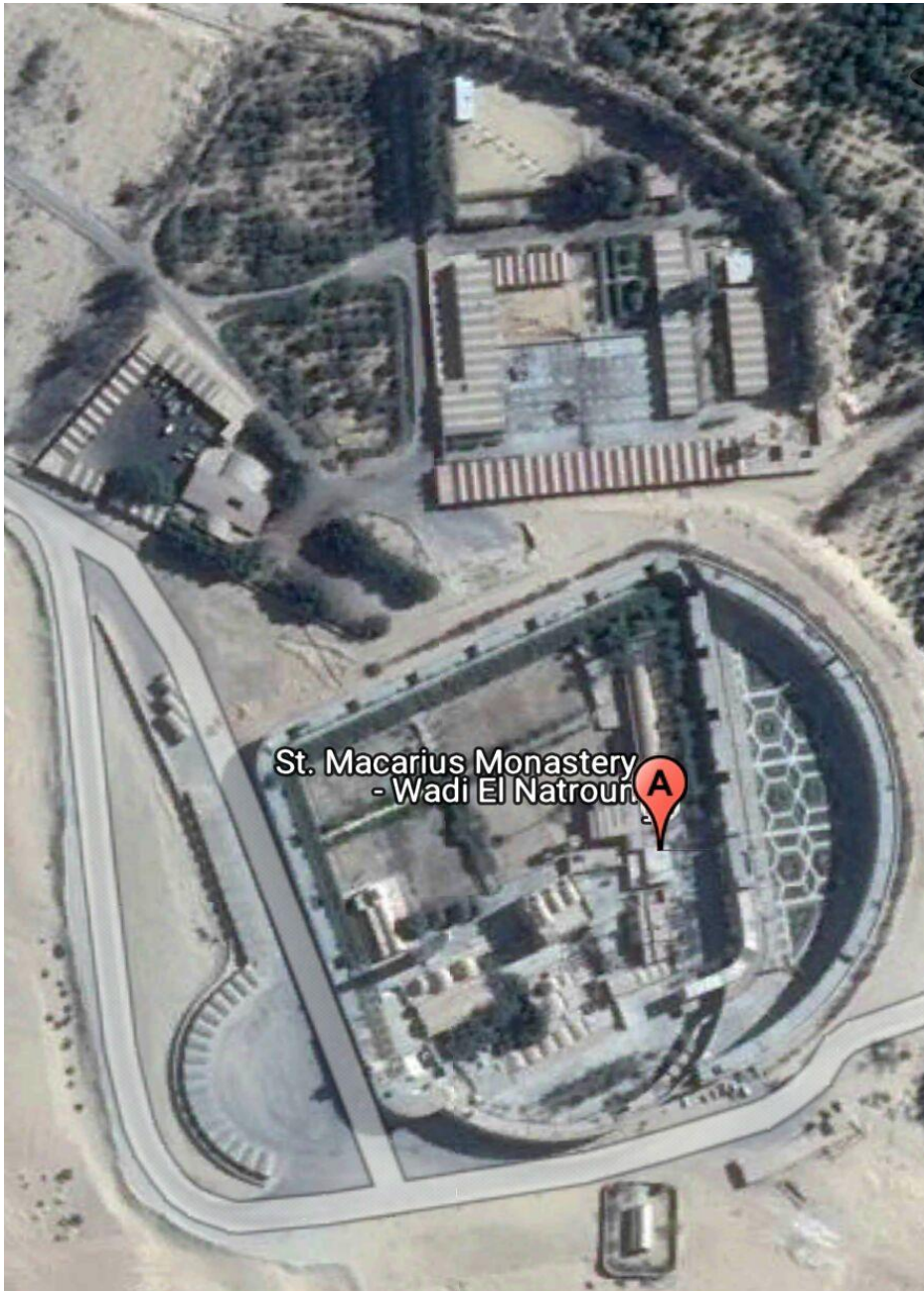


Fig:1 Plan of The location of The monastery of St. Macarius from the Satellite

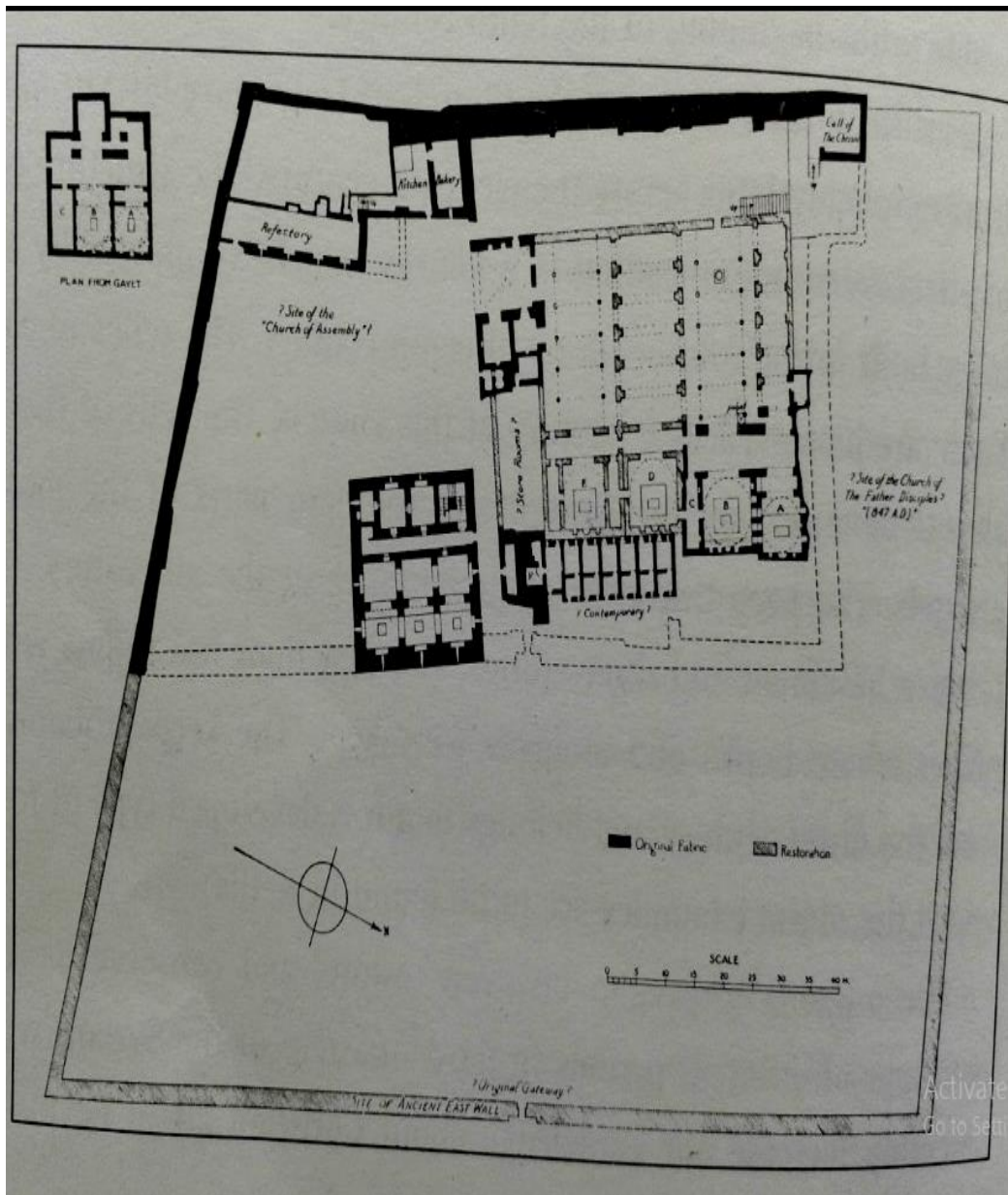


Fig:2 Plan of The Monastery of St. Macarius.



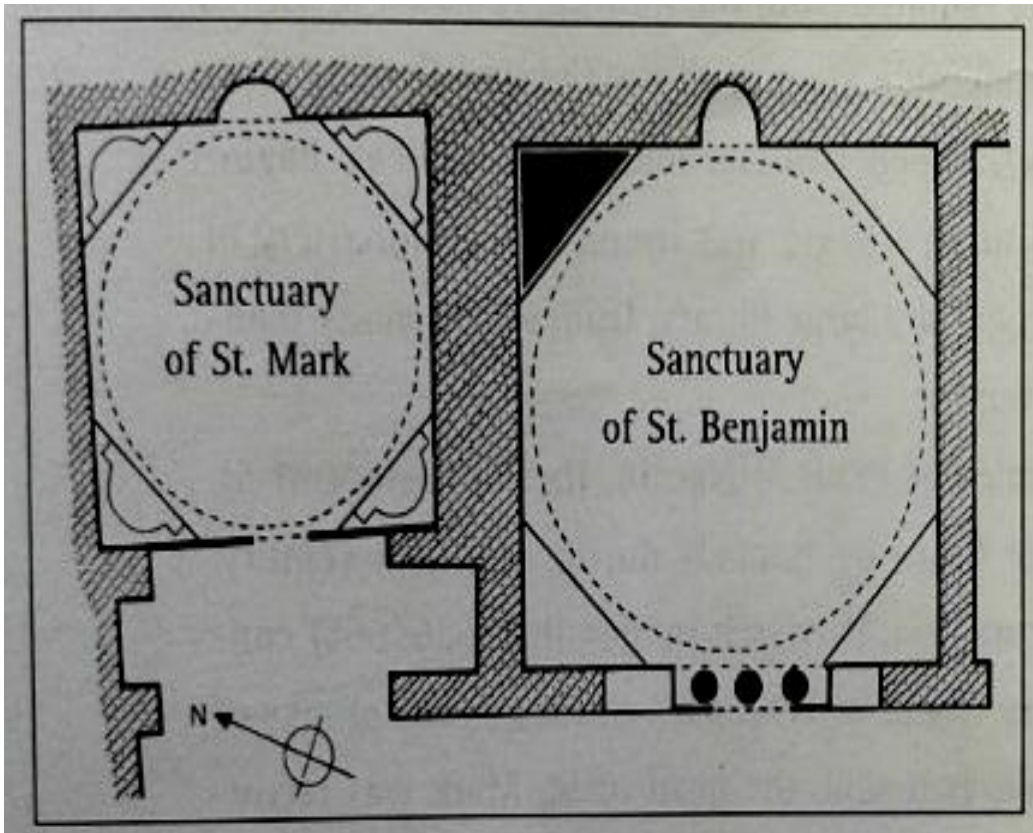


Fig:3 Sanctuaries of Sts. Mark ( at present dedicated to St. John the Babtist) and Benjamin.

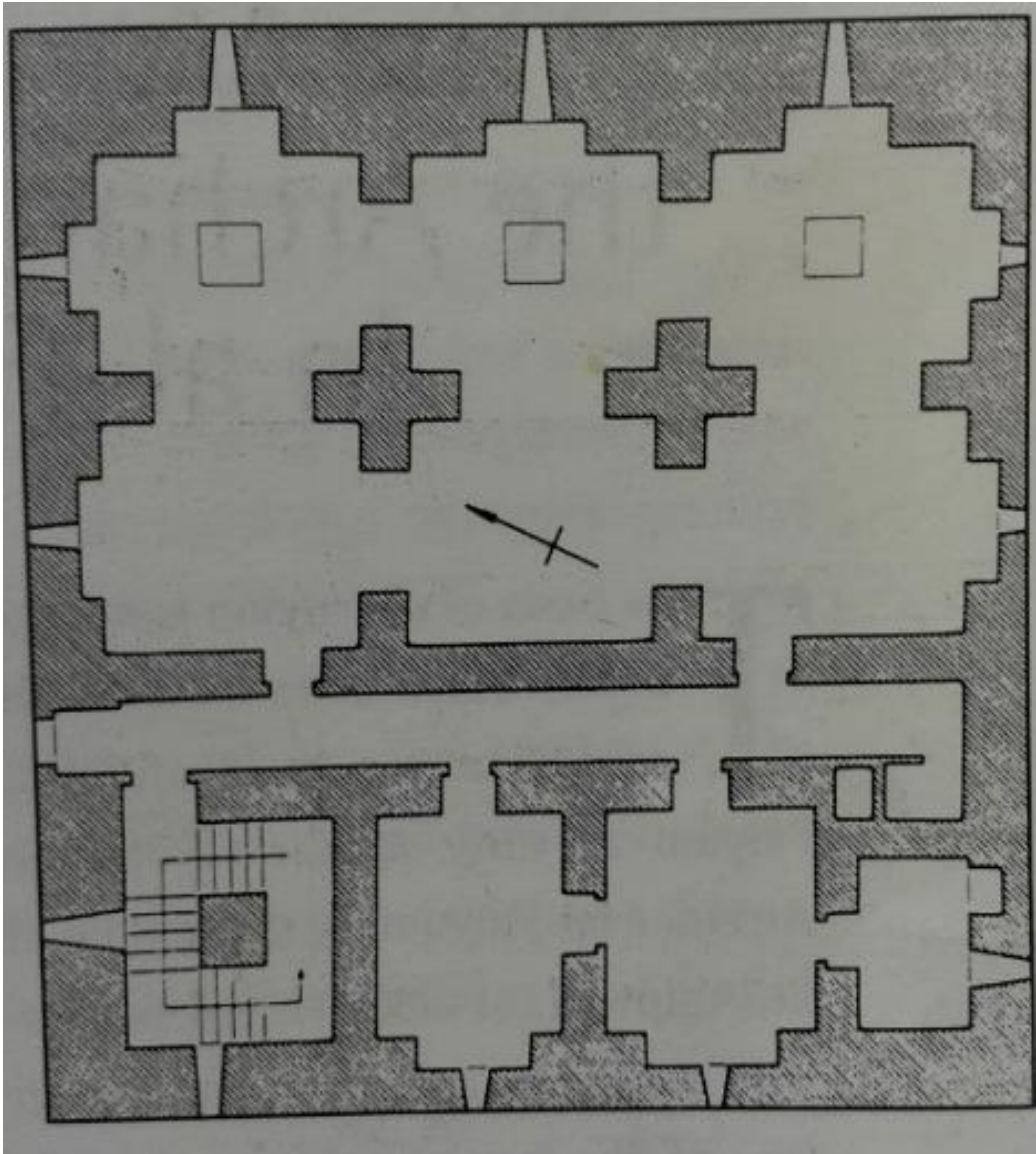


Fig:4 The Keep of The Church of St. Macarius

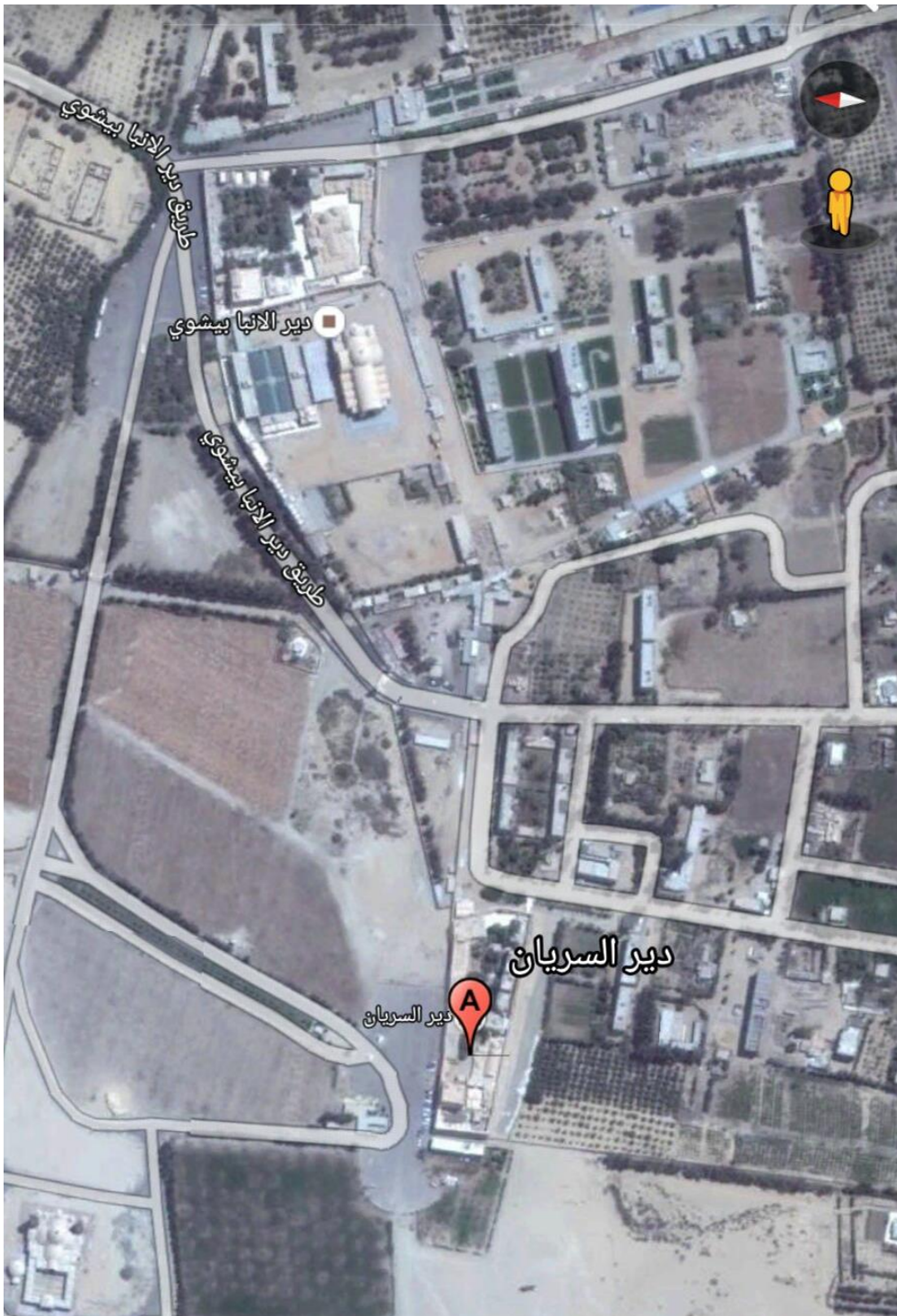


Fig:5 Plan of The location of The monastery of Syrian from the Satellite



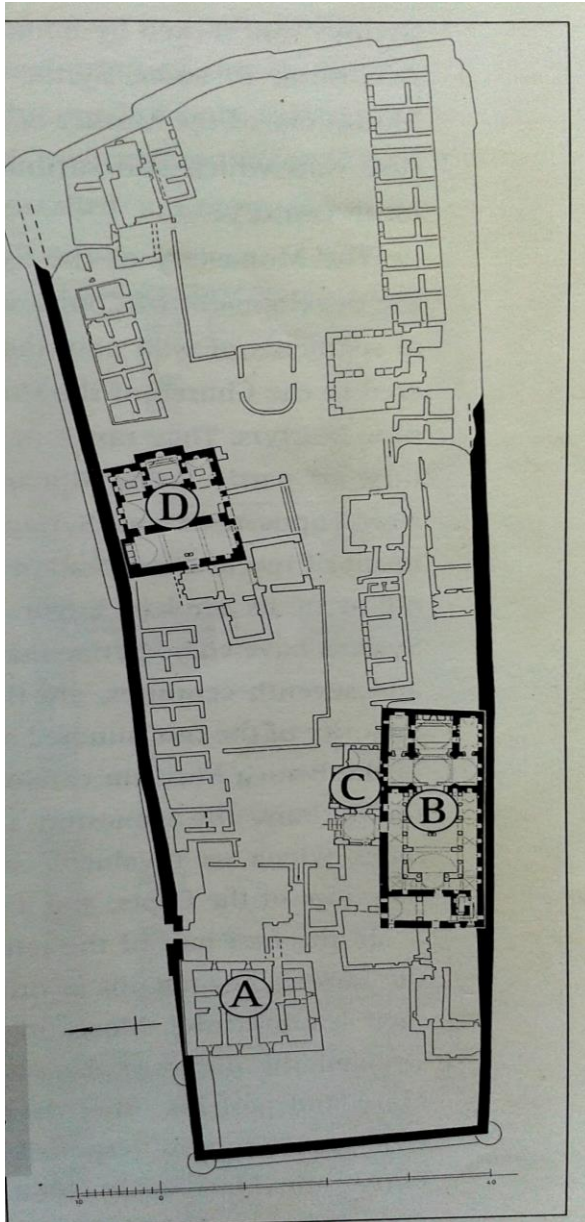


Fig:6 Plan of Dayr al – Suryan.

A: The Keep .

B: Church of the Holy Virgin Mary .

C: Church of the Forty – nine Martyrs.

D: Church of The lady Mary

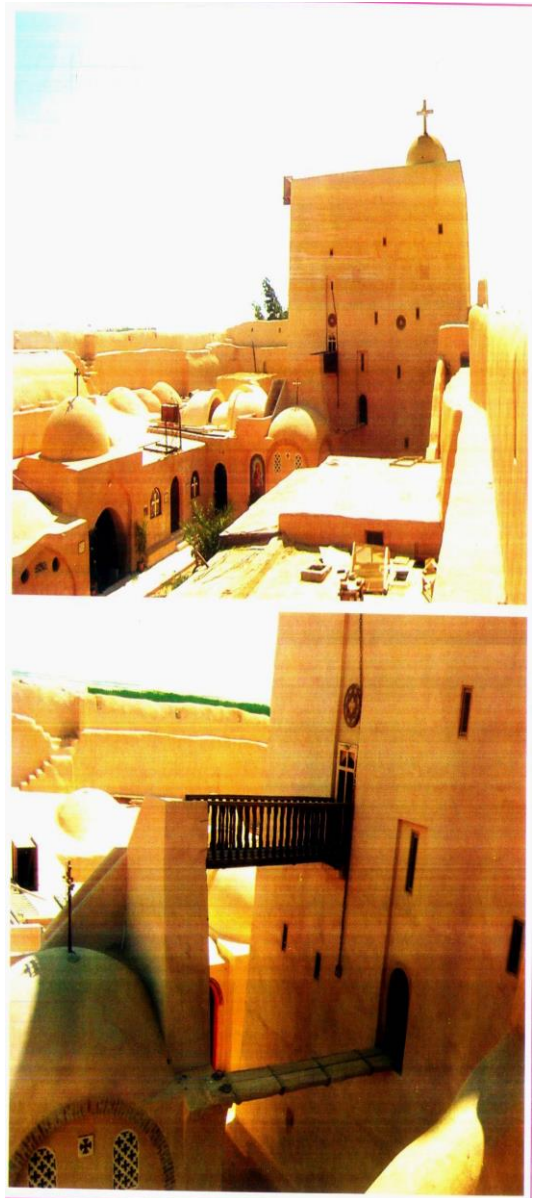
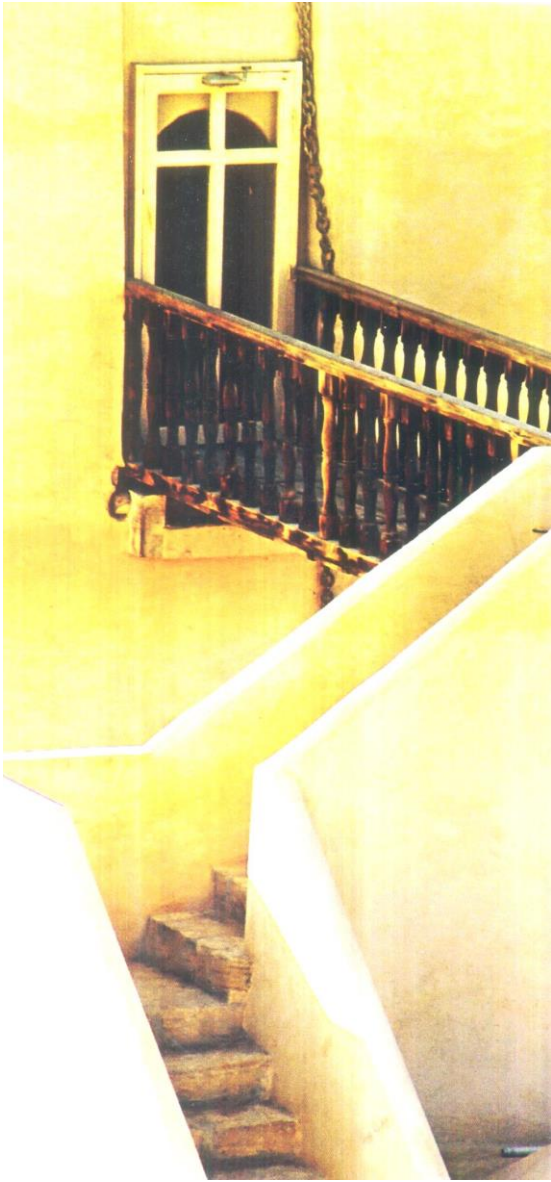


Fig :7 the keep of the monastery of the " El-Sourian"

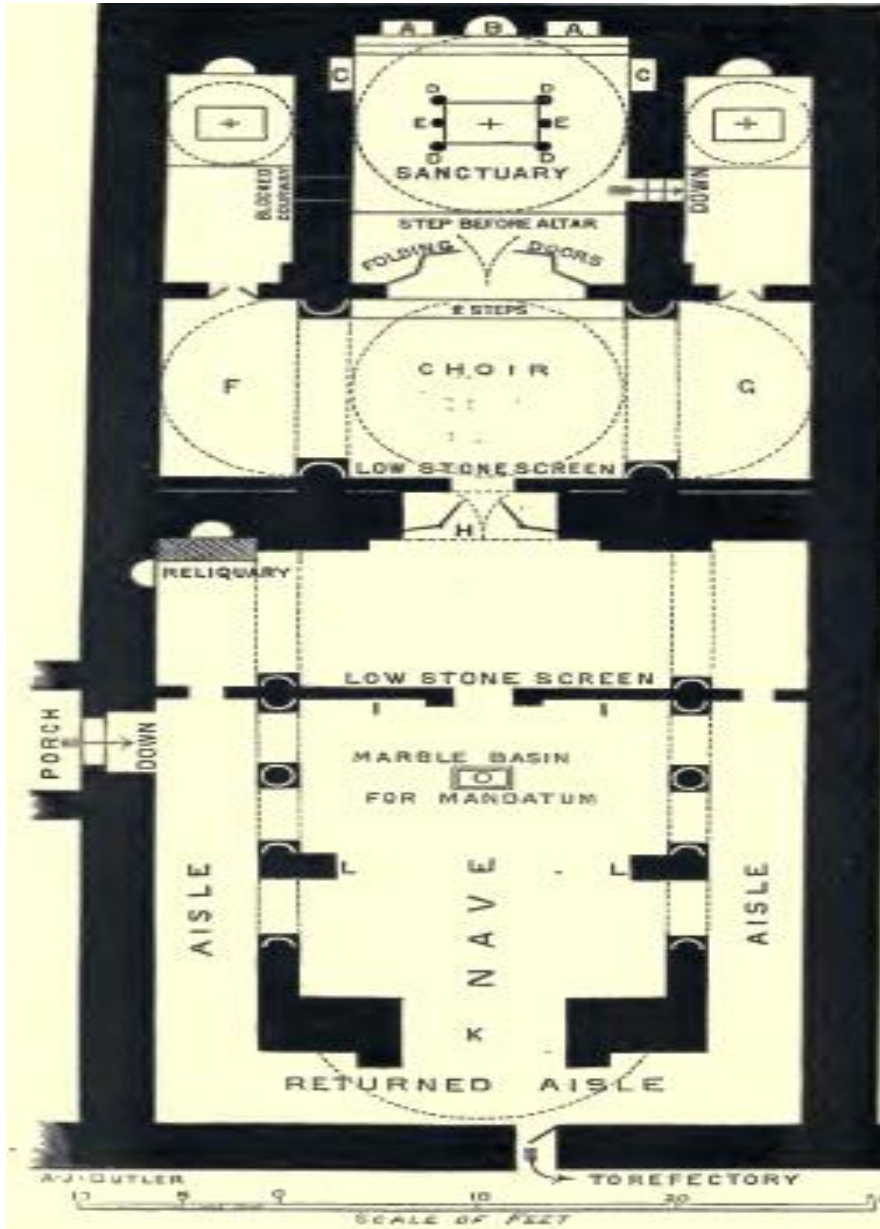


Fig:8 Plan of the Church of Al' Adra





Fig:9 the Refectory of the Monastery of the " El-Sourian "



Fig:10 : St. Ephraim's Tree .



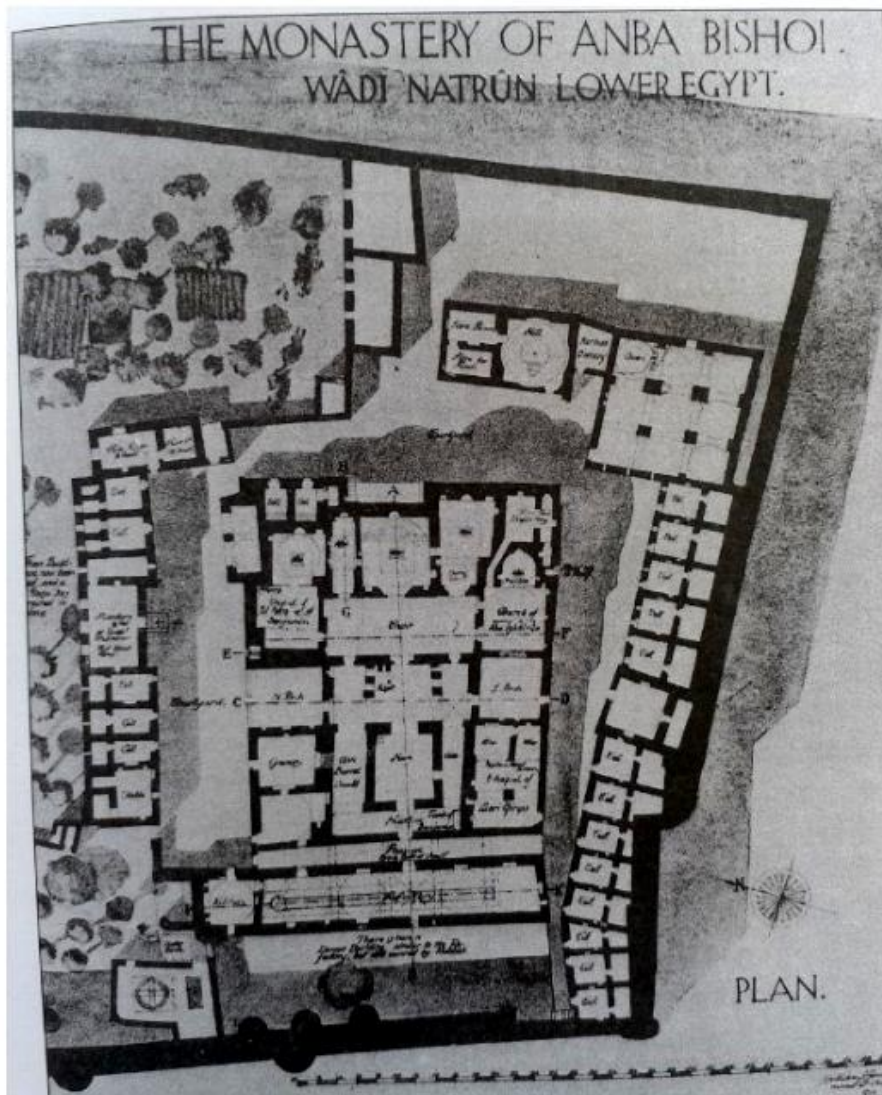


Fig:11 plan of the Monastery of Anba pishoi



Fig:12 The Tower of the Monastery of St.Pishoi

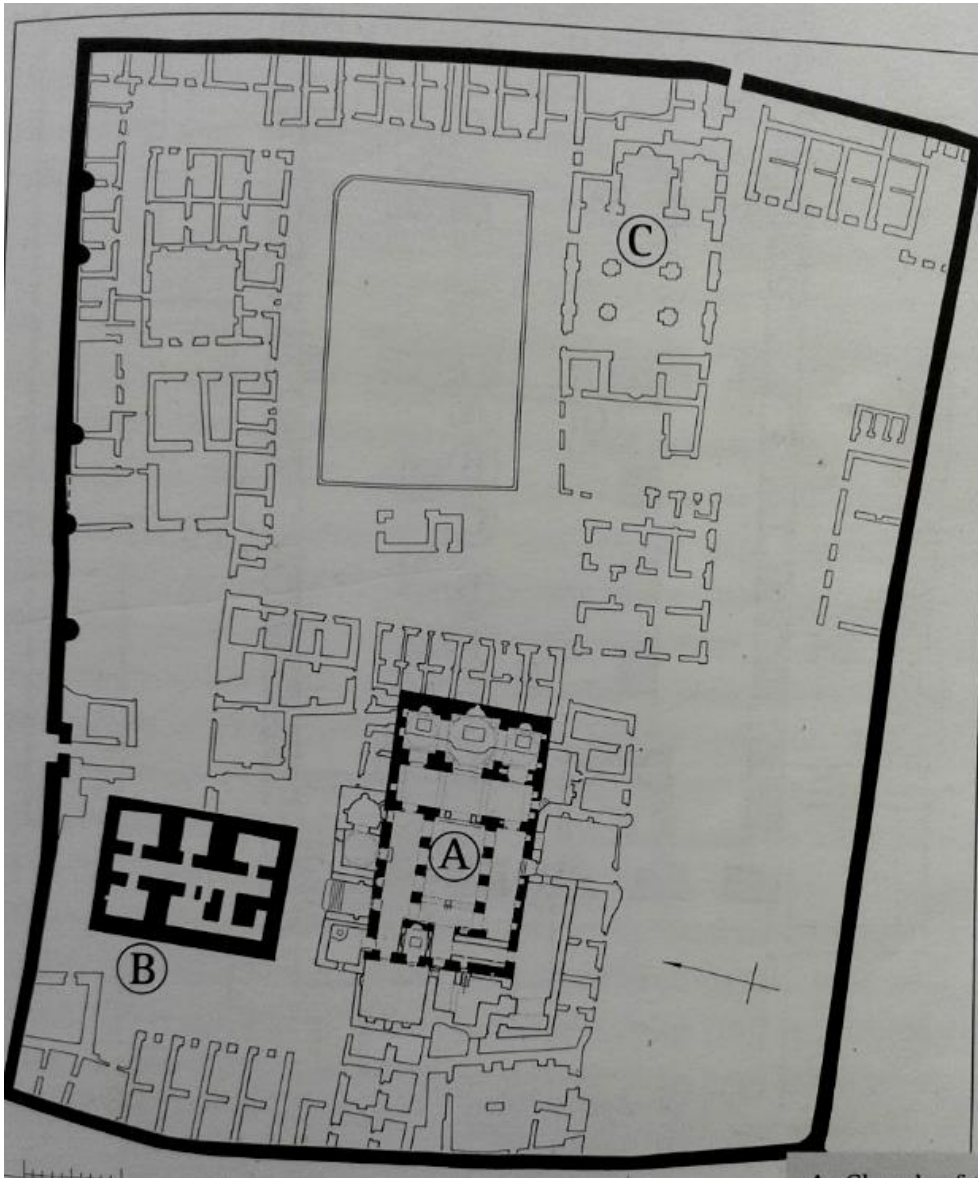


Fig:13 plan of The Monastery of al- Baramus  
(A) Church of the Holy Virgin Mary.  
(B) The keep or tower  
(C) Church of St.John the Babtist.





Fig:14 The Keep to the north of the Church of the Virgin