



Mansoura University
Faculty of Tourism and Hotels

Artistic Archaeological Study of St. Abu Sefein Church in Qena Governorate

By

**Shaban Samir Abd Elrazik
Mohammed**

Assistant Professor in Tourist Guidance
Department, Faculty of Tourism and
Hotels Minia University

**Mohamed Sahry Bershawy Abd
ElAzim**

Lecturer in Tourist Guidance
Department, Faculty of Tourism and
Hotels Minia University

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المخلص

دراسة أثرية فنية لكنيسة القديس أبي سيفين

بمحافظة قنا

محمد سهري برشاوي عبد العظيم

مدرس بقسم الإرشاد السياحي، كلية
السياحة والفنادق، جامعة المنيا

شعبان سمير عبد الرازق محمد

أستاذ مساعد بقسم الإرشاد السياحي،
كلية السياحة والفنادق، جامعة المنيا

المستخلص:

على الرغم من تناول بعض الدراسات والأبحاث العلمية بعض العماثر المسيحية في محافظات الصعيد مصر، إلا أن الدراسات التي تمت تناولت الكنائس المسجلة أو الشهيرة منها في هذه الأقاليم، لذا فالأمر يتطلب المزيد من جهد الباحثين والمتخصصين في عمل المسح الأثرى لمدن وقرى محافظات الصعيد، فالمكتبة العربية في أمس الحاجة إلى دراسات تحليلية شاملة للسماة المعمارية والفنية للعمارة المسيحية الباقية في صعيد مصر، بل

وللعمائر المسيحية فى مصر بشكل عام. ولقد دفع هذا الأمر الباحث بالقيام بدراسة إحدى هذه الكنائس - غير مسجلة فى عداد الآثار- وهى كنيسة القديس أبى سيفين بنقادة بمحافظة قنا للمساهمة بجهد متواضع فى هذا النوع من الدراسات المنشودة.
الكلمات الدالة: كنيسة، أبى سيفين، نقادة، قنا.

Abstract

Several studies and scientific researches dealt with some Christian buildings in the governorates of Upper Egypt. However, a few studies dealt with the registered or the famous churches in these regions. Therefore, Researcher and specialists should exert more efforts in making an archaeological survey to the cities and villages of Upper Egypt's governorates. Also, there Arabic library is in dire need of comprehensive analytical studies of the architectural and artistic features of the remaining Christian architecture in Upper Egypt, and even of Christian buildings in Egypt in general. This prompted the researcher to study one

of these churches - not registered among the antiquities - which is the Abu Seifin Church in Naqada, Qena Governorate, as a kind of contribution to such studies.

Keywords: Church, Abu Sefein, Naqada, Qena.

Research Problem:

The research problem lies in the researcher's desire to study one of the important archaeological churches in Upper Egypt to be enlisted upon the tourism programs due to its importance from the architectural, artistic and historical point of view. In addition, this church is not registered as an antiquity until now.

Research Objectives:

- Studying the architectural outline of the church and the raw materials used in its construction.
- Understanding the importance of the oldest dated wooden screen in the churches of Upper Egypt, that is preserved in the church under study, and calling for its preservation in the Coptic Museum in Cairo.

- Indicating the importance of the inscriptions adorning the church including the titles, names of craftsmen, supplicative phrases, and names of saints.
- Revealing the importance of Abu Sefein Church in terms of its archaeological, architectural and aesthetic value to Upper Egypt, and calling for its inclusion in tourism programs.

Introduction:

The Church of Saint Abu Sefein is located in the village of Sous, ca. 8 km to the south of Naqada, Qena Governorate. This church is not registered among the antiquities, nor has it been well-studied archaeologically in an independent study. However, Nabih Kamel Dawud and Dr. Adel Fakhri⁽¹⁾ it referred to it briefly. In view of the

⁽¹⁾ Nabih Kamel Dawoud and Adel Fakhri, "Tarikh al-Masihiya wal-Rahbana wa Atharihima fe Ibroshatei Naqada, Qus, Esna, Luxor wa Armant", St. Mark's Foundation for Coptic History Studies, First Edition, Cairo, 2008 AD, p. 181.

archaeological, architectural and artistic importance of this church, the researcher managed to allocate this study to record and document its architectural elements, artifacts including the three wooden screens and a number of wooden works as well.

The city of Naqada:

Naqada⁽²⁾ is a city in Upper Egypt, in Qena governorate. It is located, to the west of Qus⁽³⁾ and

⁽²⁾ Naqada had an ancient Egyptian civilization from 4000 - 3000 BC. These were followed by the Badari civilization that scholars divided it into three civilizations along about 1400 years, namely the civilizations of Naqada I, Naqada II and Naqada III. For more see:

- Nicolas Grimal, "The History of Ancient Egypt", translated by: Maher Joujati, revised by: Zakia Topuzadeh, Cairo, Dar Al-Fikr for Studies, Publishing and Distribution, 2nd Edition, 1993 AD, Abdel Aziz Saleh, "Hadaret Misr al-Kadima wa Athareha", Cairo, Central Organization for University Books, vol. 1, 1980 AD.

⁽³⁾ Qus: It was mentioned by Yaqut al-Hamawi as it is located to the east of the Nile between Luxor and Qena. It is a large and great ancient city in Upper Egypt. For more see:

- Yaqout al-Hamawi, Shihab al-Din Abu Abdullah Yaqut bin Abdullah al-Hamawi al-Rumi al-Baghdadi, (d. 326 AH / 1229 AD), Moajam al-Bildan", 2nd Edition, vol. 4, Beirut, Lebanon, 1995 AD, p. 413.

south of Qena⁽⁴⁾. It is bordered to the south by al-Qurna District⁽⁵⁾ in Luxor governorate⁽⁶⁾. It is

⁽⁴⁾ Qena Center: The city of Qena is located on the eastern bank of the Nile River. It is a famous ancient city in Upper Egypt. Muhammad Ramzy stated that it was mentioned by “Gautier in his dictionary as the ancient Egyptian called it Chabt, and its name changed in the middle Ages to Middle Thebes. It is located between the cities of Dendera and Thebes. Emilino mentioned it in his geographical works as Qula, and Abu Saleh Al-Armani mentioned it as Qanat. For more see:

- Muhammad Ramzy, "Al-Qamous al-Geograhpy lel-Bilad al-Masriya men 'Ahd Qudama' al-Masriyin ila sanat 1954 M.", Part II, Vol. 4, GEBO, Cairo, 1954 AD, P. 178.

⁽⁵⁾ Al-Qurna Center: an ancient Egyptian village that was called Habu. Muhammad Ramzy said that it occupied the western part of Thebes. It was located in Luxor, to the west of the Nile, but later it was separated during the Ottoman era.

- Muhammad Ramzy, "Al-Qamous al-Geograhpy", Part II, Vol. II, p. 162, 163.

⁽⁶⁾ Luxor: (Thebes) An ancient Egyptian city. Mohamed Ramzy said that it was called after the "Louxor, which

located ca. 31 km to the south of Qena; ca. 25 km to the north of Luxor, and ca. 640 km to the south of Cairo (Fig. 1).

Kitab Qawanin al-Dawawin for Ibn Mammari, and Tuhfat al-Irshad, al-Tuhfa, as well as other works issued in Qus mentioned Naqada, which became afterwards the center of an independent administrative province in 1979 AD.

Naqada was also mentioned in historical sources in the Islamic era. These included Al-Maqrizi's book entitled "al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk"⁽⁷⁾, and Al-Sakhawi's "Al-Tuhfa

means Palaces". It is located in Upper Egypt to the south of Qus, on the east bank of the Nile.

- See: Muhammad Ramzy, "Al-Qamous al-Geograhpy", Part II, Vol. 4, P. 161.

⁽⁷⁾ Abu al-Abbas Taqi al-Din Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni al-Obaidi al-Maqrizi (d. 845 AH / 1441 AD), "Al-Solouk Le Ma'refat Dowal al-Molouk", Investigated by: Muhammad Abdul Qadir Atta, 1st Edition, Part 1, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1418 AH / 1997 AD, p. 165.

Al-Latifa”⁽⁸⁾ · It was mentioned as a small village of the Islamic endowments dedicated to serve the Two Holy Mosques in Hijaz. In 569 AH / 1174 AD, Saladin assigned in Naqada and Sindebis - a sub-district of Qalyubia - twenty-four servants to serve the Prophet’s shrine in Medina in the Hijaz.

Salah al-Din al-Safadi also mentioned that one of his contemporaries, al-Qadi Sharaf al-Din Yunus bin Isa bin Ja'far bin Muhammad al-Hashimi al-Armanti, had assumed power in Naqada and several other regions, including Edfu, Aswan, Asna, and Qomula. This noble jurist was the deputy of Qus for ca. 30 years. He died in Qena in 724 AH / 1324 AD⁽⁹⁾.

⁽⁸⁾ Abu al-Khair Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Othman ibn Muhammad ibn al-Sakhawi, "Al-Tuhfa al-Latifa fe Tarokh al-Madina al-Sharifa", 1st Edition, Vol. 1, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1414 AH / 1993 AD, p. 35.

⁽⁹⁾ Salah Al-Din Khalil bin Aybak bin Abdullah Al-Safadi (d. 764 AH / 1363 AD), "Al-Wafi Bil Wafiyat", Vol. 29, Investigated by: Ahmed Al-Arnaout and Turki Mustafa,

In the Ottoman era, especially in 1193 AH/ 1779 AD, Naqada was ruled by the tribes of al-Hammamiyah Al-Huwara as a wilaya (principality) of Girga⁽¹⁰⁾.

Al-Sam'any confirmed that there is no other city called Naqada except this, and another in the country of "Ferghana" - Central Asia. He added that one of its most famous figures is Imam Omar bin Al-Hussein bin Al-Hassan Al-Nuqadi Al-Farghani⁽¹¹⁾.

The History of Church:

Heritage Revival House, Beirut, Lebanon, 1420 AH / 2000 AD, p. 189.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Laila Abdel Latif, "Al-Saeed fe 'Ahd Sheikh al-Arab", General Egyptian Book Organization, Cairo, 1987, p. 171.

⁽¹¹⁾ Abd al-Karim ibn Muhammad ibn Mansur al-Tamimi al-Samani al-Marwazi (d. 562 AH / 1167 AD), "AL-Ansab", vol. 13, Investigated by: Abd al-Rahman bin Yahya al-Ma'alimi al-Yamani and others, Department of the Ottoman Knowledge Society, Hyderabad, 1st Edition, 1382 AH / 1962 AD, p. 162.

The church preserves a wooden screen dated back to the Coptic year 1453 / 1150 AH (1737 AD), which is the oldest date in the church. Since the said date was found on a portable artifact that could be added at a later time to the date of construction, it is certain that the date of initiating construction precedes the year 1150 AH / 1737 AD, considering that the historian Abu al-Makarim was the first to mention the church in 1209 AD⁽¹²⁾ when he talked about Qamula⁽¹³⁾. The descriptive

⁽¹²⁾ Abu al-Makarim Saad Allah bin Gerges bin Masoud (d. 606 AH / 1209 AD), "Tarikh Abu al-Makarim 'An al-Kana'ed wal Adiera fel Qarn 12 bel-Wajh al-Qibli", Reviewed by: Bishop Samuel, Bishop of Shebin al-Qanater and its Districts, Part II, Al-Na'am for Printing, Cairo, Undated, p. 139.

⁽¹³⁾ Qamula: It is an ancient district. Its original and Coptic name is **Kamoili**. It was mentioned by Muhammad Ramzi, who said, "It was mentioned in the "Lexicon of Geography" of Amilino, and by Al-Idrisi in "Nuzhat al-Mushtaq" among the big cities in Upper Egypt. He said the village of Qamula is like a civilized city, surrounded by every blessing and virtue. It contains all species of fruits of different names. It is stated in "Moajam al-Bildan" as Qamula, a village in Upper Egypt, to the west of the Nile, Egypt, with many

and analytical study of the church shows that its construction dates back to the Ottoman era, specifically in the 12th century AH / 18th century AD, and it was renovated in the late nineteenth century AD, specifically in 1897 AD⁽¹⁴⁾.

palms and greenery. It was also mentioned in the book of "AL-Ta;e' al-Saeed", "Qawanin al-Dawawin" and "Khutut Al-Maqrizi" as Gharb Qomula because it is located on the west side of the Nile. In the book of al-Tuhfa, its name was deformed as it was called "Arab Qamula, a large district with a judge", and in 1231 AH it was called Gharb Qamula, and in 1240 AH as Qamula. In 1209 AH, it was divided into three districts, which are Al-Bahri Qamula, Al-Awsat Qomula, and Al-Qibli Qamula, and each of them became independent since then. Al-Awsat Qamula and Al-Bahri Qamula are affiliated to Qous Center As for Al-Qebli Qamula, it is affiliated to the Luxor Center. Muhammad Ramzy, "Al-Qamous al-Geograhpy lel-Bilad al-Masriya men 'Ahd Qudama' al-Masriyin ila sanat 1954 M.", Part II, Vol. 4, GEBO, Cairo, 1954 AD, P. 183.

⁽¹⁴⁾ In 1979 AD, the church of Abu Sefein in Sous was restored and renovated, and this was published in Al-Haq magazine (the fourth year, No. 37, on Saturday 24 Kiahk 1614 /1 January 1898 AD, p. 196) under the title (Kanisat Abu Sefein b-Naqada): "We came from Hazrat Hanna

Overview on the Martyr Mercurius Abu Sefein (224-250 AD):

He was born around 225 A.D. to two pagan parents who called him Philopater, (a Greek name which means 'Lover of the Father'). His father Yares was a Roman officer, and Philopater was a successful and brave soldier until he was entitled Primicerius, and became close to the Roman Emperor Decius (249-251 AD), who was very hateful to Christians and prosecuted them⁽¹⁵⁾. Emperor Decius granted

Effendi Estefanos, from Naqada, a praise to His eminence Al-Agomanos Ghattas Bishara, vice-president of the bishopric of Qena, that he exerted all efforts to take care of the affairs of the sect for the whole diocese. These included taking care of the endowments of that city. He designated Hazret al-Khawaja Mahrous Awad as the overseer of the Church of St. Abu Seifin and then proceeded to make a subscription to restore the aforementioned town's church, so he collected more than two hundred pounds." Nabih Kamel Dawoud and Adel Fakhri, "Tarikh al-Masihiya wal-Rahbana wa Atharihim", p. 234, 235.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Anba Younes, "Al-Istesh-had fe al-Masihiya", 4th Edition, Anba Royce Press, Cairo, 1969, p. 187.

him titles and medals of honor and assigned him the supreme commander of all Roman forces⁽¹⁶⁾.

When the Berber attacked Rome and threatened its people, the emperor was afraid and disturbed, but the saint reassured him and encouraged him. He himself led the imperial army, when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in luminous apparel and approached him carrying a shining sword in his right hand. The Angel called him, saying: "O Mercurius, servant of Jesus Christ, do not be afraid, and do not weaken your heart, but be strong and have courage. Take this sword from my hand and proceed to the Berber and fight them. Do not forget your Lord when you are victorious. I am Michael⁽¹⁷⁾, the Archangel, God has sent me to

⁽¹⁶⁾ Rasha Abdel Moneim Ibrahim, "Sirat al-Qiddis Anba Paul wa Tarikh Deireh al-'Amer, Derasa Tarikhiya Fanniya Maidaniya", Journal of Science and Arts - Studies and Research of Helwan University, Vol. 23, No. 4, October 2011, p. 269.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Michael: a Hebrew word from two syllables ((*Mikhā*), which means power, and (El) meaning (god), so the general meaning of the word is the power of God. The archangel Michael is the chief of the heavenly hosts, and he

inform you what is prepared for you, because you will be tortured greatly in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Him be glory. However, I will guard and strengthen you until you martyr. All the world will hear about your struggle and patience, and the name of Christ will be glorified in you". The saint took the sword from the Angel's hand with joy, and as soon as he held it, he felt a divine power filling it. Then he proceeded with the two swords (his own sword and the other sword that the angel handed to him) and attacked the barbarians, annihilating them with their king.

After this great victory, Decius noticed the absence of Mercurius from the ceremony of giving thanks to the gods. When Decius summoned Mercurius to ask about the reason for his absence.

accompanies the saints, comforts them, and helps them to sustain torment and pain. See: Anba Boutros El-Gamil and others, "Al-sankisar al-Jame' le Akhbar al-Anbia' wal Rusul wal Shuhada' wal Qiddisin al-Mosta'mal fe Kana'ess al-Karaza al-Murkosiya fe Ayam wa Ahad al-Sana al-Toutiya", 3rd Edition, vol. 1, Coptic Orthodox Love Library, Cairo, 1978 AD, pp. 128, 129.

The Saint cast his girdle and his military attire down before the Emperor, saying: "I do not worship anyone except my Lord and my God Jesus Christ." The Emperor became angry and ordered him to be beaten with whips and stalks. He ordered his torture in prison by ripping his body with pins and razors. The sharp embers of fire were placed on his both sides to be burned alive⁽¹⁸⁾. However, he endured these torments, so the emperor ordered cutting off his head with the edge of the sword on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Hatour according to the Coptic calendar corresponding to December 4, 250 AD⁽¹⁹⁾. He thus completed his holy fight and received the crown of life in the kingdom of heaven.

First: Architectural Description of the Church:

⁽¹⁸⁾ Father Tadros Yacoub Malty, "Qamus Aba' al-Kanisa wa Qiddisiha ma' Ba'd al-Shakhsiyat al-Kanasiya", Edition of St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, Sporting, Alexandria, 2001, pp. 146, 147, 148.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Rasha Abdel Moneim Ibrahim, "Sirat al-Qiddis al-Anba Paul", p. 269.

The church (Pl.1, Fig. 1) consists of two parts, the church building, and the second precedes the first from the south side, which includes the rooms or extensions of the church.

Various building materials were used in building the church, including the mud bricks, which is a feature of church architecture in the Ottoman era. Burnt bricks "*Al-Ajir*" ⁽²⁰⁾ were also used in construction and they were covered with mortar. This church now extends on area of 266 meters, and the thickness of the walls is about 0.5 meters.

⁽²⁰⁾ **أجر: Ajir:** An Arabized Persian word, with different forms including: **أجر:** Ajr, **ياجور:** Yajur, and **أجرون:** Ajrun, which is an Arabization of Akur, i.e., burnt bricks.

- Ibn Manzur (Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din Makram bin Manzur al-Afriqi al-Masri, d. 711 AH), *Lisan al-Arab*, Vol. 4, Beirut, 1410 AH / 1990 AD, p. 562.
- Muhammad Amin and Laila Ibrahim, "*Al-Mostalahat al-Me'mariya fe Watha'iq al-Waqf al-Mamlukiya*", Dar alnashr bialjamieat alamarikyaa bialqahirati, Cairo. 1990, p. 87.

It can be accessed through the main entrance in the north façade. It consists of a three-lobed arch and its spandrel is decorated with star shapes (Fig. 4). There is another modern entrance that opens now in case of crowding and overcrowding in the church. It is located at the west end of the north facade, preceded by a newly renovated vestibule.

External Facades

This church includes two facades, the most important of which is the main facade, located on the north side which has the main entrance to the church.

North Facade:

It is the main façade where the stated-above main entrance and the new entrance preceded by the vestibule are located. It consists of a two-shutter wooden door that is adjacent to a wooden door leading to the baptistery. (Pl. 2)

East Facade:

It is surmounted by shallow domes that cover the three sanctuaries, the largest of which is the middle one. This facade is distinguished by its three prominent buttresses.

Church Building:

It is divided into three sections, from the east to west as follows:

The Church Chancel: It is the east aisle and contains the three sanctuaries, the altars and the three east apses. This part is separated from the rest of the church by three wooden screens (Pl. 3). The middle screen is dated back to 1493 (Coptic calendar), i.e. around (1191 AH)/ 1777 AD. As for the two side screens, the right (south) screen is likely to be older than the middle. As for the left (north) screen, it is most likely that it is newer than the middle, but it is difficult to determine the date of their manufacture as they are blank and had no inscriptions. Each screen is surmounted by three

small rectangular openings, and each sanctuary has a square altar⁽²¹⁾.

⁽²¹⁾ The altar: an important part in the church. It is a table made of stone or wood, placed in the center of the sanctuary. It represents the holy place inside it, and it is one of its fixed architectural elements. The altar in the Orthodox Church is oriented towards the east, that is, the direction of Jerusalem. It symbolizes the presence of Christ in the Holy Communion. The altar, in the belief of the Coptic Church, represents the tomb of Jesus Christ, so it often takes a cubic shape. It is always located in the middle of the sanctuary. It is not adjacent to the wall, and its side length does not exceed one meter. It may be built of bricks, or wood. The altar refers to the slaughter, which is the sacrifice that was presented in the Old Testament by God to be burnt with fire, so God would be pleased with those offering sacrifices, or a fire would descend from heaven to burn it as a sign of contentment.

Later, the sacrifices are offered next to the altar and not above it. Rather, the sacrifice after cleaning is carried to the top of the altar to be incensed. Christianity no longer accepts the slaughtered sacrifices, but rather symbolizes only the living sacrifice that is the Lord Christ, and that is why the altars are called the Holy Table or the Table of the Lord. See: George Ferguson, "Christian Symbols and Their Meaning", translated by Jacob Gerges Naguib, 1994 AD,

The three sanctuaries are roofed by three domes, and the middle sanctuary⁽²²⁾ is that of Saint

pp. 102-103; Mustafa Abdullah Shiha: "Derasat fe Al-'Imara wal Funoun al-Qibteya", Ministry of Culture, Egyptian Antiquities Authority, 1989, pp. 66-65; Paula Al-Baramousy: "Al-Kana'ess wal Adyera Al-Athariya Be-Haret al-Roum Bil-Qahera", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Institute of Coptic Studies, 1993 AD, p. 246.

⁽²²⁾ The Sanctuary: The Holy of Holies, the Veiled Dome, and the House of God. It is headed by a door called the Royal Gate. The sanctuary also contains the altar and is located on the east side of the church. As for its floor, it rises a degree or two above the nave floor in the church. Priests only are allowed to enter the sanctuary, provided entering it with their right feet, and when they leave, they advance with their left feet, while facing the sanctuary, as it is not permissible to enter it with shoes . See:

- Fathi Attia Khorshid, "Kana'ess wa Adyirat Muhafazat al-Fayoum", Munz Inteshar al-Masihya wahatta Nehayet al-'Asr al-Othmani", Unpublished MA thesis, Faculty of Arts, Assiut University, Sohag Branch, 1982 AD, p.102.
- Zaki Milad, "AL-Kanissa wama Tarah Bedakheliha wa Kharijiha", Youssef Kamal for Printing, 1993 AD, p. 10.

Mercurius Abu Sefein. There are rooms attached to the south end the church chancel.

The Transept (Back of the Church): It is the transverse west aisle, which is divided into three squares all ceiled with a roof built of mud and palm trunks. It has windows for lighting and ventilation. The squares are opened to each other by arches that extend vertically between the wall and the pillars. They also open to the rest of the crossings of the church with an arch parallel to the east apses (Pl. 4). The transept from the west is adjacent to the baptistery (Pl. 11), which is rectangular in shape and the baptismal font lies in its center.

The Central Section: It lies between the east aisle and its sanctuaries, on the one hand and the last aisle of the church (west) on the other. It includes the central nave, which is divided into three areas, the first of which is the vertical section on the central sanctuary, which contains the nave topped with a wooden ceiling (Pl. 5). As for its ceiling, it is higher than the surroundings, and it rests on six pointed arches, distributed in two rows, three in

each row. They are topped with the clerestory which consists of rectangular windows decorated with pointed arches for lighting and ventilation, three windows in each side. From the south, there is a crossing topped with a wooden ceiling that is lower than the previous and parallel to the east apse. To the north of the nave, there is another crossing similar to that of the north, which is parallel to the east apse and represents the third section.

The Most Important Architectural and Artistic Elements of the Church:

A- The Three Sanctuaries

The church contains three identical sanctuaries, each of which is a square area of 4.60 x 4.60 m, topped by a shallow dome with a clerestory for lighting and ventilation. The middle sanctuary is that of Saint Abu Sefein (Pl. 9), for whom the church is dedicated and his feast is celebrated on 24/11 annually. The right (southern)

sanctuary is that of the Virgin and her feast falls on 21/8 of every year. As for the left (northern) sanctuary, it is that of Archangel Michael and his feast falls on 19/6 of every year. Each of the three sanctuaries has an entrance that leads to the other, which is pointed entrance. Each of them is surmounted by a pointed hood. The sanctuaries are separated from the rest of the church by wooden screens.

Wooden Screens (Iconostasis)⁽²³⁾:

⁽²³⁾ Iconostasis: Before the Council of Nicaea in 320AD, the Divine Liturgy was practiced with all its rituals in front of the people. Then entered the idea of dread and fear of the Sacred Secret, which began in Syria first - as a feature of the Antiochene rite - as the word "holy" in Syriac always means "dangerous". The priests - by virtue of their sacred personalities - were protected from the fear of being present before the Holy Mystery, unlike the people, so a curtain (that is, a veil or screen) was placed to separate them from the people, just as the screen of the Old Testament separated Jerusalem and the Holy of Holies. This curtain, which was known in the early period of the church's history, was placed on the four corners of the altar at a specific time of the liturgical prayers, especially at the beginning of division. This curtain can be found in both the Coptic and Armenian churches, besides the Syriac Church

As for the wooden screens, they are three to separate the three sanctuaries from the other sections of the church (Pls. 6, 7, 8). They are fixed to the pillars and walls with iron battens. The middle Iconostasis is made of white interlaced and inlaid wood. It was made in 1453 BC - 1150 AH (1737 AD). The date of making the other two side screens is unknown, but they are influenced by the method of making the middle screen, which consists of vertical and transverse rows of crosses. Each cross has four equal wings. The crosses surround squares containing interlaced panels of star shapes of interlaced and inlaid wood. The

of Antioch, then appeared in the Coptic Church in the Fatimid era in the form of the wooden screen with ornate carvings. It is a barrier that does not hide the sanctuary from the church but separates them only. It was first built in the church to separate the sanctuary from the nave, as the case with the church of Agia Sophia in Constantinople, which was built by Emperor Justinian (527-565 AD) in the sixth century AD.

- Athanasiwi, "Al-Kanissa, Mabnaha wa Ma;naha", Nubar House, 1st Edition, Cairo, 2003, p. 127, 128.

screen is intermediated with a horseshoe arched door opening.

Inscriptions of the Middle Screen:

Each spandrel of arch is adorned with an inscription in Arabic (Fig. 6) as follows:

Right Side:

اذكر يا رب عبدك المعلم
جرجس النجار صانع هذا
الحجاب القاطن بناحية
مصر المحروسة اذكر يا رب عمله فيه
وتعبه وشركه في ملكوت للسموات

THE TRANSLITERATIONS

Ozkor Ya Rab 'Abdak al-Mu'allem

Gergs al-Najjar sane' Haza

Al-Hijab al-Qaten B-Naheyat

Misr al-Mahrousa Ozkor Ya Rab 'Amalahu Feeh

Wata'aboh Washrek-hu fe Malakout Assamawat

THE TRANSLATION

- Lord, Remember your servant, al-Mu'Allem,
- Gerges al-Najjar, the maker of this
- Screen, who lives in the district of
- Misr al-Mahrousa.
- O, Lord, remember his work in it
- And labor. Accept him as a partner in the Kingdom of Heavens.

Middle Inscription:

السلام للشهيد العظيم مرقوريوس ابوسفين
صاحب هذا الحجاب المبارك
بصوص الكبره

THE TRANSLITERATIONS

Assalam le-Shahid al-'Azim Mercurius Abu Sefein
Saheb haza al-Hijab al-Mubarak
B-Sous al-Kubra

THE TRANSLATION

- Peace be upon the great martyr, Mercurius Abu Sefein

- The owner of this blessed screen
- In Sous al-Kubra

Left Side:

والمهتم بهذه الحجاب المبارك
المعلم عبده ابواشا نودي عوضه
يارب عوض ذلك في ملكوت للسموات⁽²⁴⁾

THE TRANSLITERATIONS

Wal-Muhtam Behazeh al-Hijab al-Mubarak

Al-Mu'allem Abdo Abosha Nodi Awadhu

Ya Rab 'Awad Zalek fe Malakout Assamawat

THE TRANSLATION

- And the concerned with this blessed screen
- Master Abdo Abosha Nodi, recompense him

⁽²⁴⁾ The phrase is intended to reward the martyrs and saints who sacrificed themselves for the sake of faith. It may be a prayer for compensation for those who made the screen for the effort and money that was spent.

- O, Lord! Recompense him for this in the Kingdom of Heavens.

Wooden Panel (Upper Section of the Middle Screen):

This panel was attached to the top of the middle screen (Pl. 10), despite the difference in the date of its manufacture from that of the middle screen as mentioned above. It is adorned with engraved inscriptions as follows:

P<C وكان خروج هذ الحجاب في اخر يوم... سنه

I?C

?C الف واربعماية ثلاثه وخمسين قبطية <C

للشهداء الاطهار الداخله سنه اربعة وخمسين

الموافق سنة الف ومايه وخمسين للهجره

اذكر يارب و عوض من له تعب في ملكوت السموات

سنة 1150

THE TRANSLITERATIONS

Wakan Khrouj Hazal Hijab fe Akher Youm...

Sanat

Alf wa'arba'maya wakhamsin Qibteya

Lel-Shohada' wal-At-har al-Dakhela sanat 'Arba'
wakhamsin

Almuwafiq sanat alf wa-maya wakhamsin lel-Hijra

Ozkor Ya Rab wa 'Awad man-lahu Ta'b fe
Malakout Assamawat

Sanat1150

THE TRANSLATION

- This screen ended on ..., the last day of the year
...
- One thousand four hundred and fifty-three
(Coptic)
- For the Pure Martyrs (and the early year of
fifty-four)

- Corresponding to the year of one thousand two-hundred and fifty of Hijrah
- Remember! O Lord! And recompense him who suffers in the Kingdom of Heavens!
- Year 1150.

The Baptistry

It is located in the west corner of the church. It is a square area of 6.50 x 4.60 m, and its wall is adorned with a wooden window.

Second: Analytical Study

1- Planning

Considering the current planning of the church, it can be found that it falls under the Basilican style (Fig. 3), as it consists of a rectangular area divided into three parts, the central nave, which is in the middle of the building, and two wings on both sides of the nave separated by buttresses and has an east apse. This planning is the outcome of church renovations in the twentieth century. As for the

main planning of the church, it was most likely the twelfth planning, which prevailed the majority of Egyptian churches during the Ottoman era. It should be noted that the twelfth planning of the church neglected significantly the architecture of the west vestibule, the choruses, recessed wings and became a mere nave.

The Nave: It consists of almost nine square areas covered with nine somewhat equal domes carried on four round columns or pillars and buttresses attached to the walls. All bear the arches extending from east to west and from north to south. They all intersect to form nine square areas covered with nine domes. The nave leads to the sanctuaries on the east side and a dome ceils each sanctuary⁽²⁵⁾. As for the Church of Abu Sefein, the researcher suggests that the plan consisted of three aisles, each of which is covered by four domes. The four

⁽²⁵⁾ Ashraf Al-Bakhshawanji, "Semat al-'Imara al-Kana'esiya Iban al-'Asr al-Othmani fe Sa'eed Misr", Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Sohag University, No. 23, Vol. 1, March 2000, 113.

domes on the east side are still in place, including three domes covering the three sanctuaries.

2- Facades:

The architect did not pay attention to the ornamentation of the facade of Abu Sefein Church, so it was devoid of decorations. The Copts in general did not care about decorating the facades of their churches as they managed to clad the facades with a layer of mortar, plaster or lime, and sometimes they left them unpainted⁽²⁶⁾. One of the Coptic Researcher indicated that the Copts negligence of decorating the facades was a necessity of their survival and a means to protect their churches from those constantly stalking them, as well as to conceal them from the Muslims⁽²⁷⁾.

⁽²⁶⁾ Ashraf Al-Bakhshawanji, "Al-'Imara al-Kana'esiya B-Muhafazatai Beni Suef wal- Minya wa Qiddisouha al-Awa'el", 1st Edition, Sohag, 2009 AD, P. 113.

⁽²⁷⁾ Paula Al-Baramousy: "Al-Kana'ess wal Adyera Al-Athariya Be-Haret al-Roum Bil-Qahera", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Institute of Coptic Studies, Department of Archaeology, 1993 AD, p. 264.

Therefore, it is necessary to refute this belief as the Copts of Egypt did not suffer sectarian or religious persecution for most of their history with Muslims, just as they did not live in isolation from their Muslim brothers, friends and business associates. Rather, the Muslims' homes are adjacent to the Copts' churches, so they consoled them in their dead and attended their joys in their churches, and even attended their feasts throughout history, so Muslims' knowledge of what is inside churches is not new. Meanwhile, some believe⁽²⁸⁾ that this simplicity and neglect of decoration can be attributed to the Copts concern with substance rather than appearance as they believe that "if our outward man is being brought to decay, yet our inner self is being renewed day and day"⁽²⁹⁾. The lack of attention to the ornamentation of the facades of Abu Sefein Church, from the researcher's point of view, is due to the economic situation, as it is located in a simple village and its

⁽²⁸⁾ Ashraf Al-Bakhshawanji, "Semat al-'Imara al-Kana'esiya Iban al-'Asr al-Othmani", p. 116.

⁽²⁹⁾ Co. 4: 16

people are simple Copts. Hence, they did not care about its ornamentation, neither from the inside nor from the outside, such as the simplicity of their homes, their lives, and the surrounding environment.

3- Entrance:

The entrance to the Abu Sefein Church is located on the north facade and is characterized by simplicity, which are two features of church architecture in the Ottoman era. There were no church entrances to the east, on the basis that this side is designated to the Second Coming of Christ "For just as the lightning flashes from the east and shines and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.⁽³⁰⁾".

⁽³⁰⁾ Matt: 24: 27.

4- Arches

The architect used several types of arches outside and inside Abu Sefein Church, including the three-lobed arch that crowned the main entrance (Fig. 4), and the pointed arch to crown the arcades in the nave (Pl. 5).

2- Analysis of Inscriptions on the Middle Screen:

First: Epitaphs and Phrases of Supplication:

The Coptic Christians were influenced by the thought of the ancient Egyptian in terms of believing that the words engraved on the funerary paintings and murals represent the link between the world of the living and the other world, which remained unknown to their imagination. Therefore, the Copts inscribed various epitaphs and phrases of supplication on their churches and tombstones due to the difference in belief, but they expressed the

same desire of the deceased's family, i.e., to obtain eternal life in a place of perfection⁽³¹⁾.

These inscriptions included some phrases of supplication implemented on the wooden screen of the church. These phrases differed according to what the scribe or the maker had in mind. They were restricted to some well-known phrases of supplication, such as:

"يارب عوض ذلك في ملكوت للسموات، اذكر يارب عمله فيه
وتعبه وشركه في ملكوت للسموات، اذكر يارب عبدك"⁽³²⁾

"O Lord, Reward that in the kingdom of heavens!
O, Lord, remember his work and labor in it. Accept
him as a partner in the Kingdom of Heavens, O,
Lord, remember your servant."

Here, the craftsman wanted to renew by using the phrase "أذكر يارب عبدك (فلان)", which means "O,

⁽³¹⁾ Badawy, la persistance de l'ideologie et du formulaire patens dans les epitaphs coptes, peeyers, 1981, p 13.

⁽³²⁾ Ashraf Al-Bakhshawanji, "Derasa Athariya lel Kanaess al-Baqiya b-Madinet Mallawi fe al-'Asr al-Islami", MA Thesis, Faculty of Archeology, Cairo University, 1994, p. 244, 245.

Lord! Remember your servant ...!" and it is a prayer to God to bestow blessing and mercy on that servant. Praying for mercy for the benefit of the deceased person was not the only wish that the family of the deceased wished on Coptic tombstones and on wooden screens in churches, as there were various phrases of supplication as follows:

1- Remembrance Phrases⁽³³⁾:

They are phrases in which God is asked to remember the individual in heavens so that he may obtain mercy. These phrases were mentioned in the form "اذكر يارب عبدك المعلم جرجس النجار" which means "O Lord, Remember your servant, al-Mu'alem, Gerges al-Najjar" within the inscription on the right side of the middle screen. It was also mentioned in the form "اذكر يارب وعوض من له تعب في

⁽³³⁾ Ahmed Talib Abdel-Dayem, "Shawahed al-Qobour al-Qibteya Bil Minya", "Derasa Tahliliya Moqarena le Namazag men Manteqatai al-Sheikh 'Abada wa Tuna El-Gabel", Unpublished MA thesis, Faculty of Arts, Department of Egyptian Archeology, Sohag University, 2010, p.29.

"ملكوت السموات", which means "Remember, Lord, and reward the tired in the kingdom of heaven" in the upper part of the middle screen.

2- Pray for Comfort Phrases

The scribe used this form of supplication, as he wanted to say, Lord, bless those who labored in your service, and participated in your work, so it came in the form "يارب عوض ذلك في ملكوت للسموات", which means "O Lord, recompense for that in the kingdom of heavens."

Second: Names:-

The Coptic artist was keen on referring to some names, whether artists and patrons of art or to those of cities and saints. It is also known that every part in the iconostasis is dedicated to the name of a saint. Therefore, the inscriptions on the screen of the church record some of the names, which help to know a lot about the lives of saints and their origins. These inscriptions also provide information on those interested in art and its patrons. Some of the names inscribed on the screen of Abu Sefein Church are as follows:-

1- The Names of Saints:

Martyr Mercurius Abu Sefein:

He was born around 224 AD to pagan parents who called him Philopater, meaning "lover of the father". His father Yaros was a Roman officer, and Philopatir was a successful and brave soldier.

2- The Names of Craftsmen:

The study of the inscriptions on the wooden screen of the church informs the reader with some names of the craftsmen, such as the master Gerges Al-Najjar and the master Abdo Abosha Nodi.

3- The Names of Cities:

Some have been inscribed on the wooden screen of the church. Although they are few, they are useful in verifying that this iconostasis was made only for this church or not. The names of cities can be inscribed on the iconostasis in two cases, either the place of iconostasis or the place to

which the patrons of art belong. The names of cities that were mentioned within the inscriptions on the wooden screen is “Sous al-Kubra”, which is now the village of Sous, and is located within the territories of al-Bahri Qimula district in Naqada center.

Third: The Titles Mentioned on the Wooden Screen of the Church:

1- Al-Shahid (Martyr):-

The term Shahid (Arabic: شهيد šahīd), "martyr", is used as "A martyr" who is slain fighting in the cause of God's religion or good cause; one who is slain by unbelievers in the field of battle. It may be called to testify bearing witness on the people. This title was called upon some sultans and kings⁽³⁴⁾. It was mentioned in the inscription adorning the middle part of the middle screen.

1- Al-'Azim

⁽³⁴⁾ Ashraf Al-Bakhshawanji, "Kanaess Mallawi al-Athariya", p. 338.

The title □Aẓ īm (Arabic: عظيم) meaning "Great", "Magnificent" or "Protector", and gives in itself the sense of pride. This title was added to the word "دولة: Dawlah" to be "Azim al-Dawlah" which means "Protector of Great of the State" as a metaphor for the importance of the opinion of its owner. The saints and martyrs were often described with it in church inscriptions⁽³⁵⁾. This title was mentioned in the middle part of the said middle screen.

3- Al-Mubarak

The title Al-Mubarak (Arabic: المبارك) meaning "Blessed" is one of the honorary nicknames by which things are described. It was used in this sense in the Mamluk era and continued in the same sense in the Ottoman era, to describe some of Ottoman monuments in Cairo⁽³⁶⁾. This title

⁽³⁵⁾ Ashraf Al-Bakhshawanji, "Kanaess Mallawi al-Athariya", p. 339

⁽³⁶⁾ Al-Qalqashandi (Abu al-Abbas Ahmed bin Ali bin Abdullah d. 756-821 AH / 1355-1418 AD), "Subh al-Asha fe Sena't al-Insha", Photocopy of Al-Amiriya Press, Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, General

was associated with the word "الحجاب": al-Hijab or screen" to indicate the sanctity of the screen and its church importance. It was mentioned in the form of "الحجاب المبارك": al-Hijab al-Mubarak: the Blessed Screen" in the middle part of the middle screen of the church.

4- Al-Mu'Allem (المعلم)

He is the guide to the right and inspirer to benevolence. Also, he is the one who practices a profession independently. It is one of the highest titles in the artisans' jargons such as carpenters, builders, blacksmiths, etc.⁽³⁷⁾. This title was also used to describe the skilled and experienced craftsman who masters and supervises other craftsmen. Hence, he has the privilege over others⁽³⁸⁾. It was mentioned in the form "اذكر يارب عبدك"

Egyptian Corporation for Authoring, Translation, Printing and Publishing, Part III, 1963 AD, Section 6, p. 188.

⁽³⁷⁾ Al-Mugam Al-Wajeez, Arab Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 432.

⁽³⁸⁾ Hassan Al-Basha, "Al-Fiunoun al-Islamiya wal Wazaif 'Ala al-Athar al-Arabiya", Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, vol.3, Cairo, 1966, p. 1108, 1110.

"المعلم" which means "O Lord, Remember your servant, al-Mu'ellem" in the right part of the middle screen of the church.

5- Al-At-haar:

The title **Al-At-haar** (Arabic: الأَطْهَار: sing. طاهر: Taher) means (the Pure), with clean clothing, to clear or purge from defects, to free from guilt or evil, and pure water is that suitable for purification, and pure women who are clean of menstruation⁽³⁹⁾. The Copts used this title in addition to the martyrs to become "الشهداء الأَطْهَار" : "Pure Martyrs" as they were purified from their sins by their martyrdom⁽⁴⁰⁾. This title was inscribed on the wooden panel surmounting the middle screen.

⁽³⁹⁾ Al-Mugam Al-Waseet, Arabic Language Academy, Al Shorouk International Library, Cairo, 2004, p. 568.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Ahmed Eissa Ahmed, "Alqab wa Wazaif al-Aqbat fi misr al'iislatmiat min khilal alkitabat alarabiat ala majmueat altuhaf bi almathaf alqibtii", Research in the Journal of the Faculty of Arts in Qena, South Valley University, No. 7, 1997, p. 39.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The research concludes many recommendations that can be summarized as follows:

- 1- Turning the city of Naqada in Qena Governorate into an open museum and enlisting it upon the world tourism map due to its unique monasteries, churches and archaeological palaces.
- 2- The governorate should pay attention to the cleanliness of the place surrounding Abu Sefein Church in Naqada in order to preserve the aesthetic image of the church.
- 3- Holding scientific and cultural symposia to display a documentary film on the history of the Church.
- 4- Preparing brochures about the church and its contents, and distributing them to school, universities and public libraries.
- 5- Encouraging the study of Coptic architecture at schools, institutes and colleges of architecture, to

raise the level of Egyptian society's culture and qualify the Egyptian architects in terms of researching, studying and preserving that architecture.

6- Reviving studies on Coptic antiquities to bring this era into focus.

Results:

The research also concludes many results that can be summarized as follows:

1- The church was studied archaeologically and artistically for the first time, to shed light on its unique artifacts, represented by three wooden screens.

2- The study confirmed that the church was first built before the Coptic year 1453, which corresponds to 1150 AH / 1737 AD, based on the inscriptions of the wooden screen.

3- The screen dated back to the Coptic year 1453, which corresponds to 1150 AH / 1737 AD, is published herein for the first time.

4- The study confirmed that the main architectural planning of the church is only a developed form of the twelve church layouts that prevailed in the Ottoman era during the 12th -13th centuries AH / 18th – 19th centuries AD, so the history of the current church can be dated back to that period.

5- Arabic inscriptions were used alongside the Coptic letters and words on the wooden screen dated back to 1453 AH / 1737 AD.

6- The study indicated that there is an error in the date mentioned in the inscription on the wooden screen of the church, as some references mentioned it in 1493 of Martyrs, and the study indicated that it is the year 1453 of Martyrs.

7- The study showed some names of the church craftsmen, including “al-Mu'allem Gerges Al-Najjar, al-Mu'allem Abdo Aboasha Nodi.

8- The study referred to the names of some cities that were inscribed on the iconostasis, which helped in knowing the saint's home or place of bringing he iconostasis, including “Sous Al-Kubra, Egypt”.

9- The study highlighted the Coptic artist's use of different forms of numbering years, such as "the year of the fifteenth cycle", and the dating in the form of the "Diocletian era", which the Copts adopted as a calendar system, which was replaced by the Era of the Martyrs.

10- The study indicated that there are some titles inscribed on the wooden screen of the church, including **Al-Shahid** (الشهيد: Martyr), **Al-'Azim** (عظيم: Great), **Al-Mubarak** (المبارك: Blessed), **Al-Mu'alleem** (المعلم: Master) and **Al-At-haar** (الأطهار: the Pure).

11- The study stated that the most important types of arches in the church are the tri-lobed and pointed arches.

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Fig. (2) Location of Abu Sefein Church in Sous Village.
(Google Earth website)

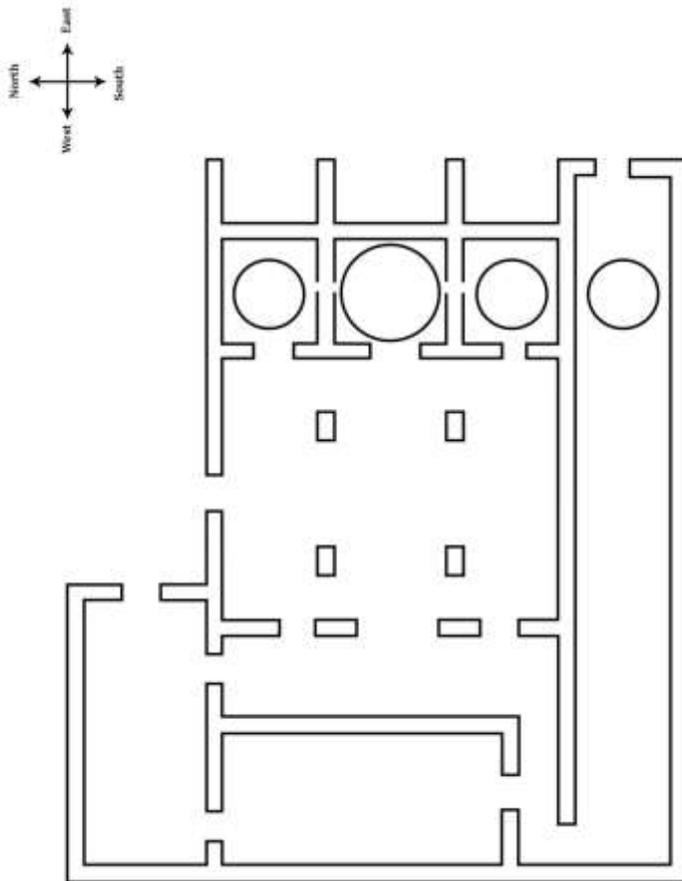


Fig. (3) Plan of Abu Sefein Church. (Made by the Researcher)

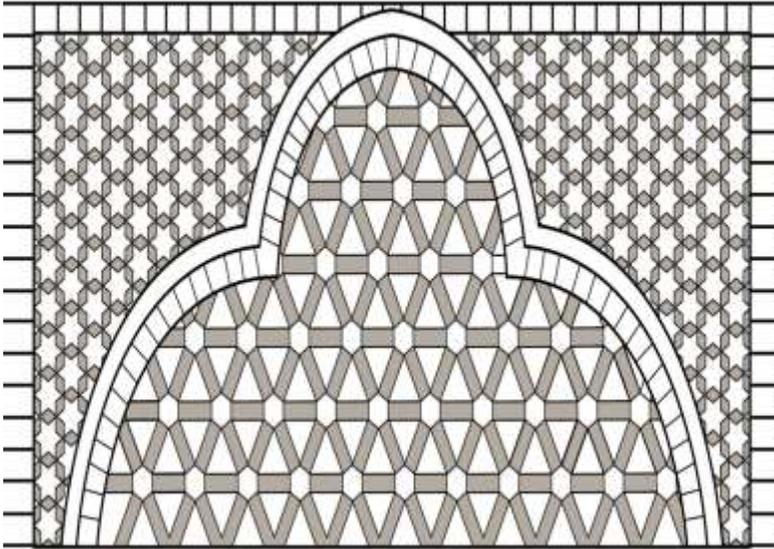


Fig. (4) Details of the Main Entrance of Abu Sefein Church on the North Facade.

(Made by the Researcher)

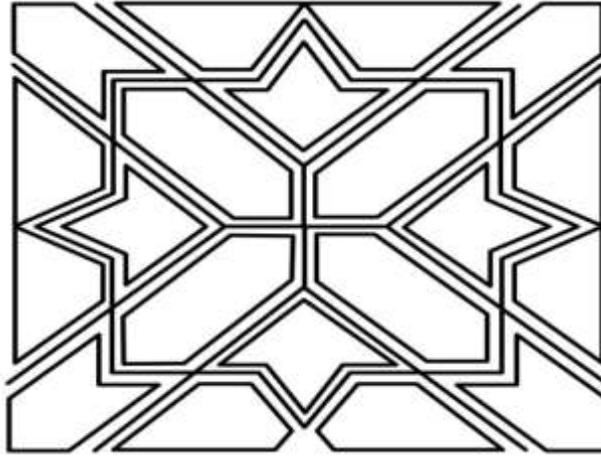


Fig. (5) Details of the Iconostasis of Abu Sefein Church. (Made by the Researcher)

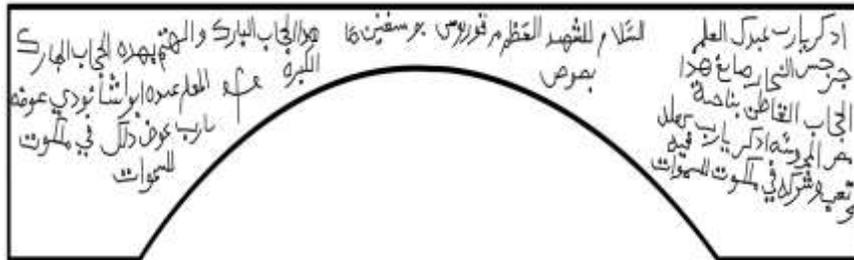
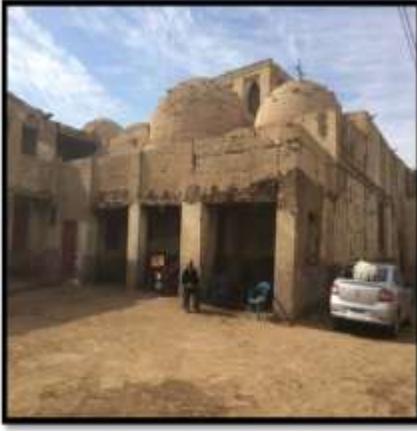


Fig. (6) Inscriptions on the Middle Iconostasis of Abu Sefein Church.

(Made by the Researcher)

Plates



Pl. (1) The Church of St. Abu Sefein. (Photographed by the Researcher)

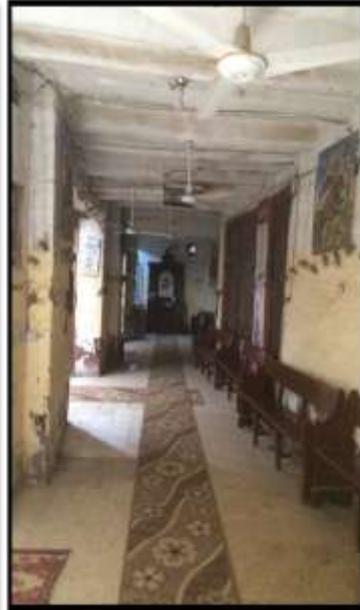


Pl. (2) The North facade and Main Entrance of Abu Sefein Church. (Photographed by the Researcher)



**Pl. (3) The east aisle of Abu
Sefein church.**

**(Photographed by the
Researcher)**



**Pl. (4) The Transept of
Abu Sefein church.**

**(Photographed by the
Researcher)**



Pl. (5) The central nave of Abu Sefein church.

(Photographed by the Researcher)



Pl. (6) The middle Iconostasis of Abu Sefein church.

(Photographed by the Researcher)



**Pl. (7) The southern (Right)
Iconostasis of Abu Sefein church.
(Photographed by the
Researcher)**



**Pl. (8) The northern (Left)
Iconostasis of Abu Sefein
church. (Photographed by
the Researcher)**



**Pl. (9) The middle sanctuary
Iconostasis of Abu Sefein church.
(Photographed by the
Researcher)**



**Pl. (10) The Wooden
Panel of the middle
Iconostasis of Abu Sefein
church. (Photographed by
the Researcher)**



**Pl. (11) The baptistery of Abu Sefein church.
(Photographed by the Researcher)**