

NOTES ON THE ANCIENT CHRISTIAN CHURCHES OF MUSR EL
ATEEKAH, OR OLD CAIRO, AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

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CERTAINLY not the least interesting of the numerous objects which delight the traveller in and around the glorious city of Cairo are the Roman fortress-walls with their included Christian town and its neighbourhood known as "Musr el Ateekah," or "Old Cairo," and the ancient Christian "*Dayrs*," or convents in the same vicinity, which lift themselves up between the Nile and the desert, amidst the vast pottery-strewn mounds of the Egypto-Roman Babylon and the Arabian Fostat.

These ancient and too little known establishments may be divided into the following groups, arranged in their order of succession as a visitor would arrive at them, starting from Cairo.

I. *Dayr Mari Meena*, containing the *Kineseh*, or Church of S. Menas, belonging to the Copts, with the Church or chapel attached, which, after being occupied for many years by the Syrians has been restored to the Copts; and, secondly, an Armenian Church, not of ancient date.

II. The walled village of *Dayr Abou Sefhîn*, which includes the Churches of (1) Sitt Miriam; (2) Mari Macarius and Abou Sefhîn; and (3) the Church of Amba. Shenouda.¹

III. The ancient Roman fortress of *Musr el Ateekah*, Old Cairo, *par excellence*, commonly called *Dayr esh Shema*, which contains within its venerable and massive walls (A) a Jewish synagogue, formerly the Christian Church of S. Michael; (B) a Roman Catholic Church of no great antiquity; (C) a Greek Convent and Church; and (D) the five Coptic Churches, of which two are dedicated to Sitt Miriam, the Blessed Virgin

¹ It is not always easy to obtain the correct designation of these Churches, but the present list may be relied on as correct, having been submitted by an intel-

ligent young Copt of my acquaintance to several clergy of the Metropolitan Church and corrected by them.

Mary (of which the chief is known as *El Moallaka*, "the Suspended"), one to the Kedeseh Berbarra, one to Mari Girgis (S. George), and one to Abou Sergeh, which last contains the crypt, or small subterraneous church of Sitt Miriam.

IV. *Dayr Bablin*, which contains a Church dedicated to Sitt Miriam, and is interesting as preserving through the wreck of ages and the vicissitudes of conquest the name of the Roman Babylon of Egypt.

V. *Dayr Teodris*, containing the two churches of Sitt Miriam and Abon Eer wa Hanna.

VI. *Dayr Melek Michael*, a residence of the Metropolitan, which contains the Church of the Archangel S. Michael.

VII. And lastly, some distance further on, on the way to Toorah, the *Dayr and Church of Adra Miriam*.

It may be remarked here that the word "Dayr," or Convent, does not now in Egypt, whatever it may have done formerly, imply, like the term "Convent" or "Monastery" in Western Christendom, a society of brethren, clerical or lay, pledged to celibacy and living in common, but it is applied in some instances to a village of Coptic Christian people, living crowded together within narrow walls of ancient date, in houses surrounding one or more Churches, upon a site which has often been in their possession from the later Roman period. Visiting one day the Coptic Metropolitan Archbishop, Marcus of Alexandria, who till the appointment of a new Patriarch acts as the ecclesiastical head of the Coptic Church, I remarked that it was interesting to see in remote districts these small Christian communities living upon their own small ancestral properties in the midst of a hostile Mohammedan population. His Grace replied, "It is the work and will of God alone." In other instances the word "Dayr" is used to designate one or more churches with the residences of the married priests adjacent; the whole being inclosed within lofty walls, entered, for security's sake, by a single extremely small doorway. Amongst the Copts the patriarchs and bishops alone are denied the luxury of a wife.

I have been unable to find any detailed account of the Christian Dayrs, near Cairo, and experience has shown me that they are, with one exception, rarely visited by travellers. I propose, therefore, to set down a few notes upon each in

turn. First, however, it may be well to make mention of some of their common characteristics, and to specify some of the interesting objects connected with Divine worship which are the least likely to be familiar to Western eyes.

A Coptic church then, is, in its simplest form, an edifice of three parallel aisles divided from each other longitudinally by pillars of ancient Greek or Roman construction, with more or less of wooden screen-work and with few exceptions terminating in apses. This area is again divided transversely by screens, many of which are exquisitely carved, and inlaid with ivory and ornamented with paintings. The easternmost of these screens answers to the Iconostasis of the Greek Church, and is entered by three doors, or by a door and two windows covered with rich hangings, which, however, are drawn aside during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and display the priest standing in the midst before the altar with his face turned eastwards. A square stone altar stands in each apse, and behind is a semicircle of stone steps with a central niche, anciently the seat of the Bishop, but commonly used now as the receptacle of one or more pictures. The building is usually surmounted by from one to three domes. The windows are small, and placed high up, and are almost invariably unglazed. These provisions ensure a constant and refreshing coolness, and deserve the close study of architects employed to erect Churches in our own tropical colonies. In the westernmost division of the Church, below the pavement, is a large tank for the water blessed on the Eve of the Feast of Epiphany. The Baptistry is usually a small building attached to the main Church rather than forming an integral portion of it. In some instances there are chapels in the clerestory.

The following are some of the more curious objects to be found in these churches.

1. Altars. These are *built* of stone, and are square in form. Underneath is a cavity entered from behind, intended originally, I suppose, to contain relics. On the upper surface of each altar is a groove in which the sacred elements are placed, covered with a square wooden cover painted with figures of saints or scriptural scenes. At celebrations the altars are covered with cotton cloths embroidered with crosses. Now and then a more ancient cloth is seen made

of richer materials. On each altar are generally two brass candlesticks, a taper-stand, incense-box, snuffers, hand-cross, and a few tattered MSS. books written on cotton paper.

2. Hand-crosses in use in the services made of brass or silver.

3. Processional crosses of brass, to which are affixed flags.

4. Censers of brass or silver. Some of these are of fine work and considerable antiquity. In some cases silver bells are attached to the chains.

5. Bronze coronas.

6. Ostrich eggs suspended from the roof as in Moham-medan mosques.

7. Gospel covers of silvered iron or silver gilt. These cases are sometimes of great magnificence. They are her-metically sealed, and during portions of the services are placed on a chair outside the Iconostasis. Theoretically, I believe, they contain the *four* Gospels, but one obtained by me from Dayr Teodrus, and opened at the British Museum, was found to contain only a silk rag and a portion of the Gospel of S. John.

8. Cups, patens, and spoons of silver for the administra-tion of the Eucharist.

9. A curved object of silver in the shape of a cross, used to place over the Consecrated Bread as it lies in the paten, and to support a square cloth of silk or cotton with which the whole is covered.

10. Four-sided wooden boxes to cover the sacred Elements when placed in the altar-groove.

11. Wooden crosses bound with faded garlands of roses. These are buried in the Church on Good Friday and ex-humed at Easter; the rose leaves being distributed amongst the congregation, and by them carried home. Rose leaves are also sometimes seen scattered upon the relics of Saints.

12. Bronze basins and ewers for washing the hands at the Eucharist. These are sometimes elegant specimens of Arab art, and ornamented with enamel.

13. Staves in the form of a Tau cross, used to lean on during long-protracted services. The people thus "worship, leaning on the top of a staff."

14. Relics. The relics of the Saints are placed in wooden cases covered with silk or shawls, which exactly resemble very gaudy bolsters.

15. Pictures. These are chiefly affixed to the screens. They are executed in the stiff Byzantine style. Some appear to be of considerable antiquity.

16. Triangles and brazen cymbals used in chanting the services.

17. Immense wooden chairs used by the Bishop or as a stand for the Evangelisterion.

18. Ancient Arabic glass lamps. Not more than two or three of these now remain, and these specimens are of plain white or blue glass.

19. Standing candlesticks of large size of wood, iron, and brass.

20. Crowns of silver used to place upon the heads of the bride and bridegrooms at weddings.

21. Silver ornaments in the shape of rounded fans, generally embossed with the figures of Cherubs or Saints. Small tapers are sometimes stuck upon them during Divine Service.

I now proceed to speak in detail of the Dayrs as they occur, beginning at the end next Cairo.

I. *Dayr Mari Meena*. This Convent is situated a little way outside the city gate, near the beginning of the Mounds of Fostat. It contains an ancient church dedicated to S. Menas, a saint who flourished at the beginning of the fourth century. The chief Convent which bore his name, which is interesting as recording that of the first recorded King of Egypt, was at Alexandria, where to this day, as also in other places in Egypt, terra-cotta bottles are frequently found bearing the name and effigy of the Saint. In the Church of Mari Meena is a very curious ancient brass candlestick in the form of two dragons with retorted heads, and with the tails meeting and intertwined in the centre. Seventeen candles were placed in holders attached to the heads and along the back of the dragons. The pulpit is a good specimen of *Opus Alexandrinum*, executed in antique marbles. In this Church may still be found suspended *in situ*, and still in use, an ancient Arabic glass lamp of plain blue glass. Attached to the south aisle of the nave is another Church or chapel, for long in the occupation of the community of Syrian Christians, but now again, in consequence of their diminished numbers, restored to the Copts.

Hard by is an Armenian burial-ground and Church,

which last was rebuilt about 150 years ago. In a niche in a wall outside the Church, before a picture, is a brass lamp, imitated from the ancient example in the neighbouring church of the Copts.

Part of the boundary wall of this *Dayr* is surmounted by large earthenware pots, so slightly embedded in mortar that they would come down with any robber who should attempt to climb over. This seems an improvement upon the broken bottles which British householders so delight to place upon their walls.

II. *Dayr Abou Sefhîn*. This *Dayr* contains three churches.

1. *Sitt Miriam*. This Church is of far less antiquity than the others in this walled village, and has apparently been rebuilt. It consists of three aisles. In the first compartment I noticed in a cupboard a perfect ancient Arabic lamp of white glass. This Church has the almost unique peculiarity of ending square, and not as is usual in apses. The Bishop's seat-niche behind the central altar is lined with coloured Arabic tiles of no great merit. The tradition, even, that the Bishop used to occupy this position is in this Church entirely lost.

2. *Amba Shenouda*. A fine large Church of four aisles. The nave is supported upon eight pillars, on one of which is painted the image of a Saint. The baldachino over the central altar deserves notice. The pulpit is a fine example of early woodwork. Here are some fine ancient altar-cloths, and two silver crowns used in marriages, and bearing the inscription, "Glory to God; on Earth Peace." There is also an Evangelisterion of base silver.

3. *Abou Sefhîn*. A Church of extraordinary interest. The massive low door of approach has been covered externally with the scales of crocodiles, some of which remain *in situ*. Inside there are two compartments, and two tanks for the Epiphany water, in the westernmost of which I noticed a unique arrangement, designed apparently to carry off water to the people outside. In this compartment there is also a very curious prostrate stone column, 4 ft. in length by 10 in. in diameter, completely covered with Arabic inscriptions. The pavement round one of the water-tanks is adorned with *Opus Alexandrinum*.

This Church consists of a nave, with a high-pitched roof and lofty dome, and two aisles, the Baptistry being in that

to the south. Here, in a shrine or reliquary is preserved the arm of S. Macarius, and above hangs a picture of Abou Sefhîn. The pulpit, under which is buried a Coptic Patriarch, is of most exquisite workmanship, and is adorned with superb mosaics executed in marble intermixed with mother of pearl, and with Coptic inscriptions cut in white marble. Over the second screen is the text, "My soul hath a desire to enter into the Courts of the Lord." The third screen is superbly inlaid with ivory. The Iconostasis is also magnificent with inlaid wood and ivory, carved with the utmost taste, and some of the pictures above upon a gold ground are of unusual size, and apparently very ancient. Part of the pavement is enriched with patterns incised in the marble. The baldachino over the central altar is fine, and behind the altar is a superb circle of steps leading up to the patriarchal chair of white marble. The walls of the central apse are enriched with excellent *Opus Alexandrinum*, above which are disposed some very fine Arabian tiles. In this apse is a perfect wooden reading-desk of peculiar shape, and a beautiful ewer and stand of Arab work, adorned with blue and green enamel. In the chapel of S. Michael the seat-niche is lined with small old Arabian tiles.

III. *Musr el Ateekah*, Old Cairo, called also *Dayr esh Shema*, the name Musr el Ateekah not being *confined* to this walled village, but *embracing* also the neighbourhood.

The Jewish Synagogue, as has been observed, was anciently the Christian church of S. Michael, and is said to have been made over to the Jews by the Copts, in lieu of an unpaid debt, by decree of one of the Arabian Caliphs during the Middle Ages. In form it resembles a Basilica, and it is entered by a kind of porch, with a descent into it of two or three steps. The nave is separated from the side aisles by twelve ancient marble pillars, above which is a gallery, the clerestory being supported by eight more marble columns. The aisle runs round the west end, and the western gallery, under which is the entrance, is supported by a single pillar. In the apse, and above and around the niche, in which are placed the Holy Books of the Law, are arabesques and leaf-work, with inscriptions elegantly executed upon wood and plaster in Hebrew characters; and in the side aisles is some fine screen work, which, from its general character, and especially from the introduction of birds and gazelles or

other animals in some of the panels, is plainly of Christian work. Underneath the eastern end is a fine well or fountain of water, supplied by percolation from the Nile, and reputed to be possessed of curative powers. In the centre of the building is the tomb of a reputed prophet. The eastern extremity of this edifice has evidently been reconstructed. Outside is a doorway now bricked up, but ornamented with elegant arabesques in plaster, and having on the right two niches, apparently designed for lamps. Immediately behind the Synagogue there is a fine view of a portion of the massive Roman walls of the ancient "Babylon" of Egypt, and of the interior of one of the semi-circular flanking towers. These last, like the walls, are constructed of limestone, with courses of red tiles at regular intervals, and with red tiles arranged round the top of the windows, as in the Aurelian wall at Rome. The following are the dimensions of this interesting synagogue, which, it is much to be wished, could be rescued from its present state of profanation and restored to Christian worship :—

	Feet.	Inches.
Length of nave	49	0
Length of apse	6	8
Width of nave	17	0
North aisle	8	7
South aisle	10	1
Western aisle, from entrance-door to pillars	9	10

The *Greek Convent* is a large pile of buildings, built close by and partly upon a portion of the Roman walls. Inside at the top of a flight of steps is a circle of ancient pillars with old capitals around a well. This edifice forms a kind of vestibule to the small Chapel of the Forty Saints, in which is a throne for the Greek Patriarch, and some very ancient paintings. Above, again, is the large and richly decorated Church of S. George, of which the walls are partly lined with superb Arabian and Persian or Rhodian tiles.

Behind this Convent is a Roman tower, named by the people "El Borg." It contains three rooms, one of which has a fine *pointed* brick arch and a vaulted roof. The doors have round arches filled up square with stones and dark red bricks. This building is now used as a mill, the wheel being turned by a horse.

Sitt Miriam. No. 1. This church has been rebuilt, and contains little of interest.

Sitt Miriam. No. 2. One of the most interesting churches in the neighbourhood of Cairo. It is partly erected in one of the bastion towers of the Roman gateway of Babylon, and being approached by a lofty staircase with a vaulted roof of brick, it is termed *El Moallaka* (the Suspended). This church has five aisles, the principal of which are supported on either side by pillars of marble and granite. One or two of these, from the introduction of the Cross amidst the Corinthianizing foliage of the capitals, appear to belong to Roman Christian times. Beams of wood, covered with ancient Coptic inscriptions, extend uninterruptedly along upon the top of the capitals and across a series of pointed arches, one of which rises above and between each pair of pillars. The lofty roofs are of wood. In the principal aisle stands a remarkable pulpit. It is of marble, supported on fifteen pillars, and ornamented with mosaics. Its marble staircase is ornamented with two sculptured crosses. A certain Patriarch, named Abraham, lies buried under this pulpit. The principal screen is exquisitely sculptured in wood and ivory, and over it are good paintings of our Lord and saints and angels. Two other screens are also very fine. The woods used are cedar and ebony. In a small space, between the central and left-hand altar-chapels, are preserved the two leaves of a cedar door, sculptured with great delicacy, spirit, and elegance. This is without doubt the finest piece of ancient Christian sculpture in Egypt, and deserves the closest inspection. It is much to be regretted that it has never been engraved. The two upper compartments represent crosses amidst interlacing foliage, carved at different depths. The other compartments display the following subjects:—the Adoration of the Magi, our Lord's Baptism, His Last Entry into Jerusalem, His Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, and another subject which I have not been able satisfactorily to identify. Over each of the altars is an ancient baldachino of wood, supported on marble columns. In this Church there is the example, so far as I know, unique in a Church, though of course common enough in Mosques, of a window of stained glass. In one of the aisles a portion of the pavement is executed in marble mosaic, and in one of the cupboards I discovered an ancient broken lamp of plain white glass.

In the chapel, called the "Chapel of the Ethiopians," a

circular ornament inclosing a cross is sculptured in the centre of the altar-slab; and in a neighbouring chapel stands an immense, ancient wooden chest. In a third chapel the rare feature appears of a basin for washing the hands inserted in the wall. The Baptistery occupies a portion of the circuit of one of the Roman gateway towers; it contains superb mosaics in marble and mother-o'-pearl, and a white marble font resembling in shape a common cooking copper. The interior of the other Roman gate tower is partly used as a burial-place, the interments being made in vaults. On the front of one of these tombs is inserted a white marble roundel representing a cross within a wreath. Near the door leading to these tombs, and over another door, in a small chamber, is the most interesting inscription in four lines on a beam of cedar, partly concealed in the masonry, which has been published, although imperfectly, by Sir Gardner Wilkinson, in "Murray's Hand-book for Egypt."² With the assistance of Mr. Eaton, who is now preparing a new edition of that work, I copied the inscription afresh, and I believe that its correctness may be relied on, although its position and the decayed state of the wood renders its collation a matter of difficulty. It will be seen that the beginning of each clause is imperfect.

— AM — M — ΤΑΙΑΧΛΥCΠΑΝΤCΛΩCΜΗΚΕΚΤΗΜΕΝΟ
 CΕΝΘΑΚΑΤΩΚΕΙΠΑΝΤΟΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΗCΘΕΟΤΗΤΟC
 ΩΛΥΤΟΥΡΓΟΥCΙΝΛΙΑΝΩC — Τ — Α —————]
 — ΤΩCΑΥΤΟΝΓΕΡΕΡΟΥCΙΝΕΝΤΡΙCΑΓΙΑΦΩΝΗΑΔΟ
 ΝΤΕC§ΛΕΓΟΝΤΕCΑΓΙΟCΑΓΙΟCΑΓΙΟCΕΙΚΕΠΛΗΡΗ
 CΟΟΥΝΟC§ΗΓΗΤΗ —————]
 — CΟΥΠΟΛΥΕΥCΠΑΧΝΕΚΕΟΤΙΕΝΟΥΝΟΙCΑΩΡΑΤΟC
 ΩΝΠΟΙΚΙΛΟΙCΔΥΝΑΜΕCΙΝΕΝΗΗΙΝΕΥΔΟΗCΑCΤΟΙ
 CΒΡΩΤΟΙCΣΥΝ —————]
 — ΗΤΟΡΟC — ΑΡΙCΕΠΙΚΟΥΡΟCΤΕΝΟΥΑΒΒΑΘΕΟΔ
 — ΡΟΥΠΡΟΕΛΔ^Θ § ΓΕΩΡΓΙΩΔΙΑΚ§ΟΙΚΝ^{οο} — ΤΡΑΠ[×] —
 ΔΙΟΚΛ — ΙΑ —————]

² An anastatic drawing by Sir Gardner's own hand represents this inscription with the accompanying figures, apparently representing the Twelve Apostles, with our Lord in glory, supported by angels, in the centre. See *Archæologia Cambrensis*, vol. ii., fourth series, p. 152. The

reading (which slightly differs from mine and Mr. F. A. Eaton's), and the translation of the inscription may there be found, with some remarks by the Rev. A. Cumby. The inscription is there ascribed to the third year of Diocletian, A.D. 284.

The extreme incivility and grasping cupidity, and on one occasion the violence of the priests of this most interesting Church, rendered its exploration a matter of some difficulty. As a rule these Coptic Churches are never found open except at an early hour on Sunday morning, or on a few great Feast-days, the Copts vieing with ultra-Protestants in their fondness for locked Churches.

Church of Kedeseh Berbarra.—A large and curious Church of early date. The shrine of S. Berbarra is gaudily painted in bright colours, and contains within a brass screen the relics of the Saint done up in a kind of blue bolster. The nave is supported on ten pillars, on which rest wooden beams as in the Moallaka. These are elegantly painted, and above them are pointed arches. Over these again are the ancient women's galleries,³ with four more pillars upon either side arranged severally into two bays. The aisle and gallery above is carried round the west end, two pillars in each case separating them from the nave. The lofty pulpit is of white marble enriched with fine ancient mosaics, and stands upon ten marble columns. The under part of the marble pulpit floor is adorned with a sculptured cross. This church abounds with splendid early carving in wood inlaid with ivory.⁴ There is also a curious triple standing candelabra of iron, a large brass standing candlestick, and a brass corona, the latter disused and lying amidst the rubbish in a side chapel. Here, too, I observed a curious marble pedestal, supported on four rude feet, and perhaps designed as a candlestick. The paintings over the screen before the Iconastasis are unusually good, and this screen itself has incorporated in it two fine ancient columns. In this church are several curious side chapels, and many other objects of unusual interest.

Mari Girgis.—The interesting church of Mari Girgis having recently been destroyed by fire has been entirely rebuilt. Fortunately a plan of the old church was taken by the Honourable Sir Arthur Gordon, K.C.B.

Hard by is an interesting specimen of an ancient Christian

³ The women at the present day occupy the more western compartments of the nave and aisles, the men those nearer the Iconastasis.

⁴ The superb pulpit from a Cairene

Mosque bought in the Meymar Collection, and now in the South Kensington Museum, will convey an idea of the style of the carvings.

Egyptian dwelling-house, with elegant wood carvings displaying the Cross introduced amidst foliage.

Church of Abou Sirgeh, with the subterraneous Chapel of Sitt Miriam.—This large, fine, and lofty church is almost the only one visited by travellers. The pillars which separate the nave and aisles are carried round the western end and support galleries. The clerestories on either side rest on four pillars set in bays or compartments of two each. The pulpit in the principal aisle is of fine early woodwork. The principal screen is a magnificent specimen of carved wood and ivory, and to the left of it are some fine panels sculptured with figures of S. George, various saints, and Scriptural subjects. These carvings, although curious, are far less interesting than the door-leaves in the Moallaka. Mari Girgis (S. George) it should be remarked is the Patron Saint of the Copts. In front of the Iconostasis⁵ two narrow staircases descend to a small three-aisled subterraneous chapel, with plastered walls, apparently of great antiquity. Two pillars on each side separate the centre from the side aisles. In the eastern wall of the centre aisle is a deep cavity or niche, with a slab at the bottom adorned with a sculptured cross, and with the sides and roof carefully finished in hewn stone. At the end of the southern aisle is a font embedded like a copper in stone masonry, and used for the Baptism of small children. In the side walls of each of the side aisles respectively there is another niche, at the bottom of each of which is a sculptured cross. Tradition has it that at the time of the Flight into Egypt the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Child rested in one cavity and S. Joseph in the other.

Leaving this interesting crypt-chapel, I return again to the main Church. Behind the principal altar there is a fine flight of seven lofty steps of white and coloured marbles, the wall of the apse being faced with exquisite mosaics of that rare and peculiar description wherein the various coloured marbles are intermixed with blue opaque glass and mother o' pearl.

This mixture of shell, glass, and marble is, so far as I know, peculiar to Egypt,⁶ and even there exists only in this and a

⁵ In this paper, for convenience sake, I have throughout adopted this term to express the screen immediately in front of the altar.

⁶ Mr. A. Nesbitt kindly informs me that this mixture is found also "in S. Vitale, Ravenna; and more largely in the Cathedral of Parenzo in Istria."

very few other Churches, and in some of the most magnificent Mosques. The effect is extremely good and well worthy of imitation. The left-hand altar-chapel has been modernized, in that on the right I observed a curious piece of wood sculptured with two crosses and several Coptic inscriptions. The priest informed me that he knelt upon this board when engaged in prayer.

IV. *Dayr Babūn.*

This convent is of great antiquity, and interesting, as already stated, as preserving the name of the Roman Babylon of Egypt. It contains the large and interesting church of Sitt Miriam. Its dimensions are as follows :—

	Feet.	Inches.
From western wall to first screen	11	0
Thence to second screen	15	0
Second screen to Iconostasis	12	6
Iconostasis to niche in eastern wall	14	9
Depth of seat-niche	2	0
Breadth of central apse	14	10
Breadth of church	52	0

Each compartment of the nave of this Church is supported by columns of granite or marble, with marble capitals taken from some edifice of Roman time, and the roof is vaulted with stone. The interior of the baldachino, which surmounts the chief altar, is decorated with a large picture of Christ in Glory in the attitude of benediction. In the niche of the apse our Lord is again represented, but this time holding a book. Here is preserved a silver Evangelisterion, or book-case, with a cross in the centre of each side, and a Saint at each angle. Above the cross is a Coptic, and below it an Arabic inscription. A copper-gilt candlestick, like the Evangelisterion, does not appear to be of high antiquity. In these ancient Oriental Churches usages and forms are handed down without change from generation to generation. On the central altar there are the usual two candlesticks, and a small taper-stand, all of brass. Suspended hard by is a silver censer, with small bells attached to the chains, precisely similar to those often seen on the silver anklets which adorn the "tinkling feet" of Arab children. The Epiphany water-tank is remarkable as being in the shape of a kind of floriated cross.

In the chapel of Sitt Miriam, to the left of the nave is a

reliquary of the usual bolster form, and a fair painting of the Blessed Virgin and Child. *Upstairs*, on either side of the nave, and partly opening into it, are two chapels, respectively of Mari Girgis and the Melek Michael. In the latter the wooden covering of the Sacred Elements, which is placed over the central altar-groove, is decorated on all its four sides with paintings of unusual merit, that of the Lord's Supper in particular being executed with considerable care and spirit.

V. *Dayr Abou Eer wa Hanna*, sometimes called *Dayr Teodris*.

Churches of these names are both enclosed within the same ancient wall, of which the oldest part is of dark red brick, and the more modern of the same red brick intermixed with pieces of roughly-faced limestone. This convent is reputed to be of great antiquity. Each establishment is entered by an extremely low door, opening from a common courtyard.

Abou Eer wa Hanna.⁷ This church, though a comparatively humble structure, contains a great number of valuable and curious articles.

The central chapel, dedicated to Abou Eer and Abou Hanna, has its niche adorned with the often-repeated figure of our Lord in Glory, upon a gold ground and surrounded by saints. In the left-hand chapel, that of Sitt Miriam (our Lady Mary), are two ancient silver censers of elegant design, three or four sets of brazen cymbals, and a brass corona, not now in use. I was also shown here the vessels for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. They consist of a plain massive chalice of silver, a plain silver paten, and a silver spoon, inscribed with an Arabic inscription. In the paten are two small hoops of silver, joined in the middle crosswise, and used to place under the square napkin-covering over the Consecrated Bread. In the right hand chapel, that of Mari Girgis, are several brass candlesticks, a silver censer, partly gilt, two silver hand-crosses, and two silver hand-ornaments, resembling fans with circular tops, on each of which a cherub is represented in relief. Here, likewise, is preserved a superb silver-gilt gospel-case

⁷ A Coptic inscription on an ancient piece of embroidery from this church, now in my possession speaks of this church as that of Abou *kér*, but it is un-

doubtedly called Abou *Eer* at the present time, and so it was written down for me by a Copt.

of folio size. It is adorned with a cross in relief in the centre of each side, with small crosses at the angles, and with Coptic and Arabic inscriptions and foliage-work. This fine work of art cannot, I suppose, be less than 400 or 500 years old. I also saw here some rich vestments of crimson and gold, and a girdle whose clasps of silver-gilt are enriched with niello. To the right of the church is another small chapel of Abou Eer and Abou Hanna, separated by open grill-work from the aisle. Within, the bones of these Saints are preserved in the usual bolster-like reliquaries covered with crimson silk.

Church of Teodrás.—The plan of this church is three aisles, supported upon two masses of masonry, and two groups of two elegant pillars each, and surmounted by four domes. Before the Iconostasis stands a large candlestick still in use. The night before my last visit, the aged priest, who resides in Cairo, had slept in the nave of the church, on whose floor were spread his mattress, pipe, and coffee pot. Here are one old silver, and one iron Evangelistion, many silver hand-crosses, and a silver fan ornament. I was able to purchase from the adjoining house a beautiful glass Arabic lamp, now in the Christy Collection in the British Museum, with the inscription, "O, the Learned One," in Arabic, repeated several times round the bowl.

VI. *Dayr Melek Michael.*—This convent contains the church of the Archangel Michael, and is the occasional residence of the Metropolitan.⁸ The church is of no great antiquity, though very picturesquely situated.

VII. *Dayr Adra Miriam.*—This convent is exquisitely situated close to the Nile, and at a fine bend of the river. In its external wall is imbedded at a considerable height a stone covered with Egyptian hieroglyphics, and perhaps brought from the neighbouring quarries of Toorah. The church of Adra Miriam is of no great antiquity. In it I observed a small bronze bell attached to a rod; this is the only specimen I have seen in a Coptic church. I found here a quantity of books in an onion-room! They are all written on cotton paper, and are of no particular interest, with the exception of one which contains some curious illuminations.

⁸ The different degrees of the Coptic hierarchy were thus enumerated to me by an intelligent Copt :—1. Batrách ; 2.

Mitrán ; 3. Isoof ; 4. Um-moos ; 5. Asecs ; 6. Ràhib ; 7. Shammas.