

# A COMPANION TO ANCIENT EGYPT

## VOLUME II

*Edited by*

Alan B. Lloyd

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## CHAPTER 45

# Egyptian Art of Late Antiquity

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*Thelma K. Thomas*

### 1 Introduction

The visual and material culture of Late Antique Egypt, extending, roughly, from the later third to the seventh century, preserves an unusually broad spectrum of artistic remains, ranging from the public monumentality of cityscapes, for example, to clothing and other items of personal significance. Over the past generation, the quantity of artistic evidence has grown, thanks to current archaeological fieldwork, even as the quality of evidence has been improved by modern methods of documentation, close study of past excavations, and, notably, conservation campaigns. This expanding repertory of monuments has been characterized in recent studies in relation to artistic developments known elsewhere across the wider world of Late Antiquity. Accordingly, this historical period is referred to by designations connoting world-views extending far beyond the Nile Valley. The terms “Late Roman,” “Early Byzantine,” “Early Christian,” and “Late Antique” all refer to the same core chronological span but with different cultural emphases. Although Late Roman is retrospective and Early Byzantine prospective, both terms refer to the continuation of the Roman Empire and Roman culture – in fact, the people we call “Byzantine” and locate in the mainly Greek-speaking eastern Mediterranean called themselves “Roman.” “Early Christian” refers to the spread of Christianity across the Roman Empire and beyond. The phrase “Late Antique,” however, is used in a more inclusive sense to refer not only to Rome and Byzantium but also to the political, religious, and cultural spheres of the Sassanian Persian Empire of the third to seventh centuries, and the early Arab Caliphate, which incorporated Persian and Byzantine territories into the emerging Islamicate world beginning in the early seventh century. The world of Late Antiquity comprises, in addition, kingdoms of Western Europe during this time period, as well as contemporary polities and cultures farther north, east, and south. One of the most striking traits of this period of Egyptian art is the extent to which it reflects the interconnectedness of these diverse realms.

Late Antique Egyptian society maintained ongoing, long-range communications by means of trade, travel, and remarkably effective postal systems. Whereas it is often noted that much of Egypt's role within the expansive economy of the later Empire was based upon long-distance travel, we should recognize that the massive shipments of grain sent from Egypt via Alexandria, first to Rome, then later to the new capital city of Constantinople traveled along maritime routes with other commodities and goods. Egypt exported flax and linen, for example, the cloth made from flax, papyrus paper made from the papyrus plant, raw glass, and objects made of glass. Ivory, as well, remained an important sumptuous material for export and for significant diplomatic gifts, such as the eight stools and fourteen chairs of ivory sent by the patriarch Cyril of Alexandria (412–444) to the emperor Theodosius II (408–450) in Constantinople (Cutler 1985: 20). Exports from Egypt were complemented by imports into Egypt. Ivory, for instance, came originally from India and East Africa via Red Sea trade routes and, from the south and west across African land routes. Silk was imported from China via Persia until at least the mid-sixth century when sericulture was established within the empire. Traveling to and from Egypt across the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and along extensive road networks with such goods and the merchants who traded in them were government officials and church leaders, monks and pilgrims, soldiers, scholars, and artisans. Ideas were in transit, too, not only in the minds of Late Antique globe-trotters but as expressed in texts, images, and objects.

## 2 Alexandria: City of “Splendid Beauty”

Throughout Late Antiquity Alexandria remained on a par with the premier cities of Rome, Constantinople, and Antioch. As for other Roman cities within Egypt and across the Empire, the ornamental beauty or, in Greek, *kallos*, of the city (Saradi 2008) was measured by such traits as physical setting (climate, landscape, views, and proximity to natural wonders), the splendor of its monuments (temples and, later, churches, other public buildings and spaces), the prestige of its mythical foundation, and the achievements and character of its inhabitants. The testimony of numerous written sources, although only meagrely augmented by archaeological evidence, makes it clear that Alexandria was renowned for all these categories as well as for its size and prosperity. Its cosmopolitan population included Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, and thus polytheists of various persuasions as well as monotheistic Jews and Christians. Many of the most illustrious inhabitants and visitors were associated with the city's famous schools. The site overlooked the Mediterranean and was situated on the famously fertile land of the Nile Delta. Even the shape of the city was legendary, having been selected by the eponymous founder, Alexander the Great, who was said to have devised the lines of the street plan and city walls.

### *Public art and architecture*

At the beginning of Late Antiquity, the cityscape of Alexandria was still delineated by the ancient walls (restored by Diocletian (284–305)), graced by such venerable institutions as the Library and the Museum, and enriched by the commerce made

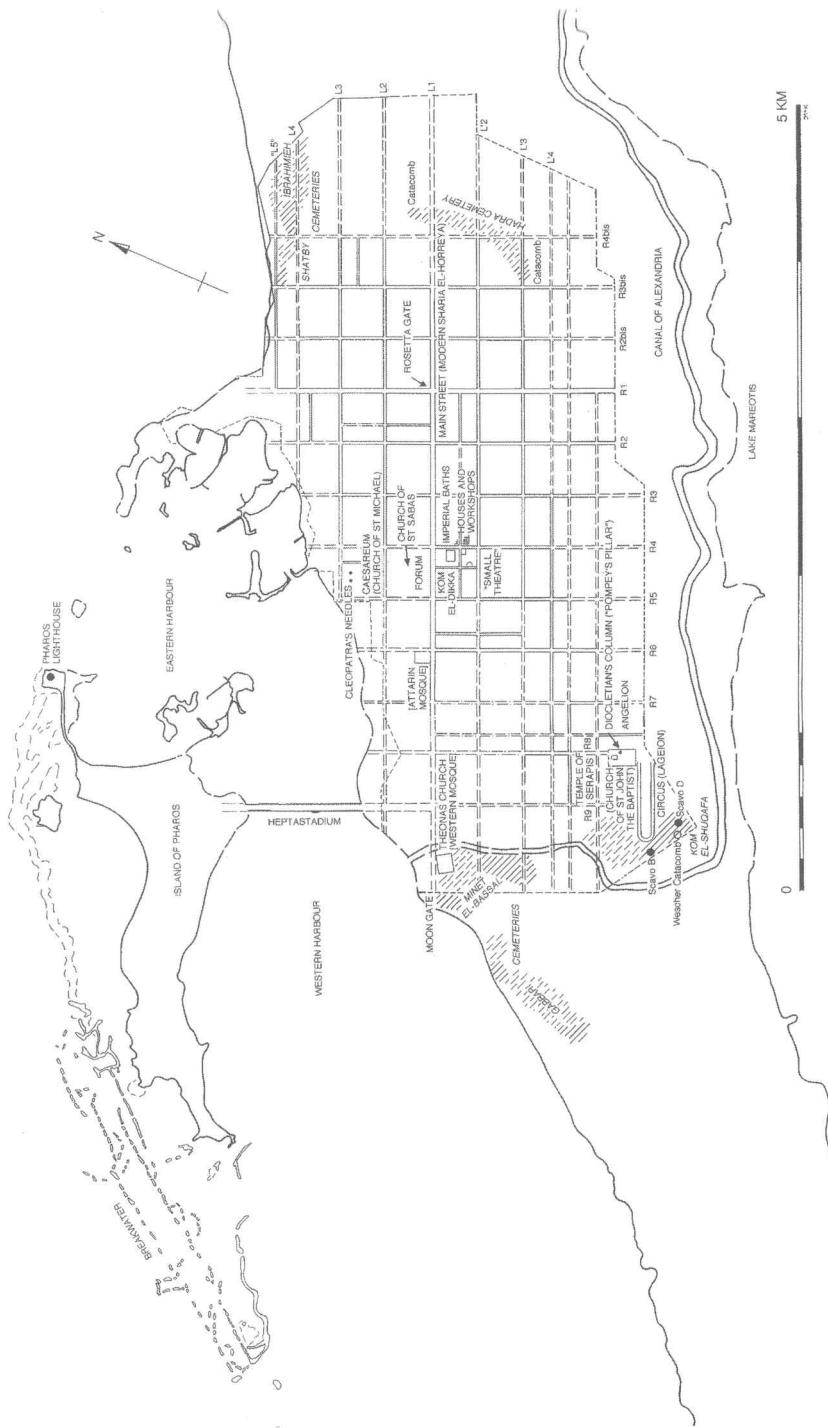


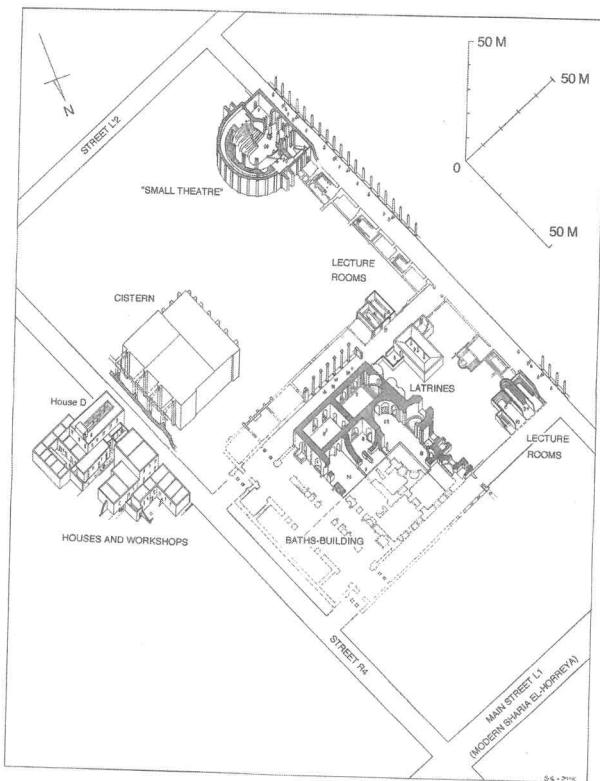
Figure 45.1 Alexandria, plan of the Late Antique city. After McKenzie: 2007.

possible by its harbors (figure 45.1). The great causeway, the Heptastadium, linked the city to the harbors and the Pharos, the lighthouse that was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (which continued to stand until the fourteenth century). Embedded within the strictly gridded plan of the city, a feature originating in Hellenistic city planning, was the main colonnaded street, the Canopic Way, which extended across the full width of the city from the eastern to the western gates. Nearly twice the breadth of other streets, this remained the main processional route through the city during Late Antiquity. To the north of this street were the forum and the Caesareum, the temple built by Kleopatra VII and marked by the re-erection of ancient Egyptian obelisks. “Cleopatra’s Needles” remained in place throughout Late Antiquity (up until about one hundred years ago, when they were taken to New York City and London). Their use in this context can be understood as a Graeco-Egyptian version of the kind of political markers, typically freestanding monumental arches and columns, employed in Roman urbanism. Indeed, Late Antique Alexandria had all the amenities of Roman city life, including a public architecture showcasing its Ptolemaic heritage, Roman culture, and Roman imperial might.

### *Architecture for education: auditoria*

The schools of Alexandria continued to be held in highest esteem during Late Antiquity, and excavations have revealed settings constructed especially for the exchange of ideas and information (Derda et al. 2007). In an area of modern Alexandria known as Kom el-Dikka, near the center of the ancient city just off the Via Canopica, in a complex of public buildings including imperial baths and what may have been park-like open space, are three clusters of perhaps twenty lecture halls (figure 45.2). The largest of these, the Small Theatre (so-called in comparison to an even larger building in the eastern part of the city) was first built in the fourth century. In its sixth-century rebuilding the stage was removed, the seating area enlarged, niches framed by columns located behind the seating and, over all, a domed roof. Elaborate sculptural ornamentation of an earlier fifth-century renovation (Corinthian column capitals and bases) was reused in the sixth-century phase of the building.

Until well into the seventh century, these auditoria accommodated teaching and oratorical displays in architectural settings that would have been familiar to the educated elite of the governing class: long rectangular rooms were lined with risers of stepped seating built of stone; the benches continuing in either an angular fashion or a curving arc around one short side of the rectangle. This arrangement allowed the audience to enjoy clear views of each other and of the center of the room; this we know from Late Antique representations of teaching and discoursing scholars represented in similar u-shaped arrangements. This building-type shares features with traditional Graeco-Roman architecture accomodating assembly and public discourse including the theatre, of course, and the city council building, or *bouleuterion*. This form was also taken up in monumental church architecture in the stepped seating of the *synthronon* provided for officiating clerics in church apses (in a church, the terminating space of the sanctuary that is semicircular, recessed, and usually vaulted. Indeed, in several of the auditoria the short end wall is apsed). A special seat set in the center of the stepped seating in the semicircular end row of seats in one of the



**Figure 45.2** Alexandria. Kom el-Dikka, mid-sixth century, axonometric reconstruction based on results of Polish excavations. Sheila Gibson and J. McKenzie, after McKenzie: 2007.

auditoria is similar to the bishop's throne at the center of a *synthronon*. Mingling with local elites in these auditoria were cosmopolitan intellectuals from places as distant from each other as Italy and Persia, who by the time of the sixth-century rebuilding of the Small Theatre had long been accustomed to competitive public disputation. Seen in this light, lecture halls might be considered arenas, enclosed and specialized, for the transmission of knowledge and oratorical displays.

### *Architecture for entertainment: the hippodrome*

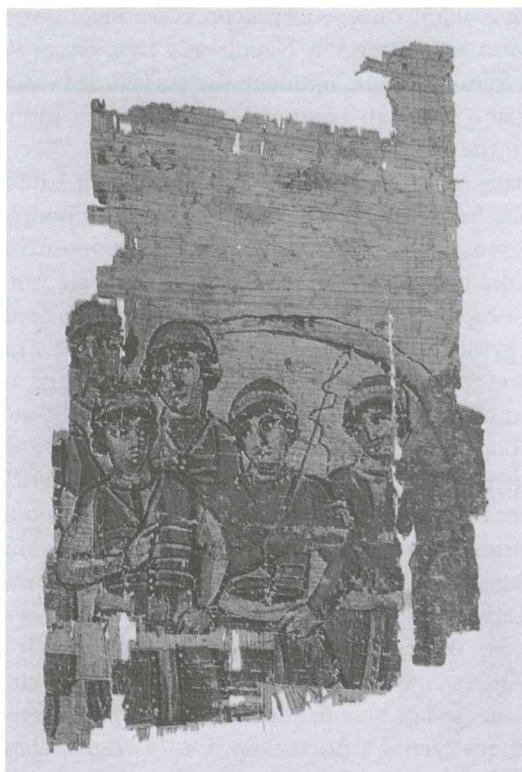
Circuses, known as hippodromes in eastern parts of the empire, were similar in form to lecture halls but much larger, open-air arenas for sensational entertainment, especially chariot-racing, which enjoyed increasing popularity from the first century throughout Late Antiquity (Humphrey 1986) and was well known across the empire to be wildly popular in Alexandria. In the southwest corner of Alexandria, just below the Temple of Serapis, was the hippodrome called the Lageion after the founder of the Ptolemaic Dynasty (Ptolemy I Lagos, also known as Ptolemy I Soter, 385–285 BC). The Lageion was one of the largest hippodromes of the Roman world. The only larger examples, in Alexandria's peer cities of Rome, Constantinople, and Antioch, all

shared the same long u-shape outlined by stepped seating constructed of stone. The remains of the Lageion as recorded in Napoleon's *Description de l'Egypte* preserved little more than this framing shape: opposite the curved end (*sphendone*) would have been the starting gate (*carceres*); column fragments were found along the center barrier around which the chariots were raced (the *spina*).

Although not usually considered from the perspective of Late Antique Egypt, it is instructive to consider better preserved evidence of the hippodromes in Constantinople and Rome for examples of the kinds of honorific monuments erected along the *spina* and to underscore the visibility of Ancient Egypt in Late Antique public art. The hippodromes of those capital cities were marked with trophies, commemorative monuments, and famous spoils (*spolia*) collected from across the Empire. It is certainly possible that references to the distinctive grandeur of Alexandria and its love of hippodrome entertainment were on display in monuments along the *spina* of the Lageion.

A scene painted on papyrus, evidently belonging to a late fifth- or early sixth-century codex (Turner 1973), was found in Antinoopolis, another of the Egyptian cities boasting its own hippodrome – there is evidence for hippodromes in other Late Antique Egyptian cities, including Memphis, Herakleopolis Magna, Oxyrhynchos, and Hermopolis Magna. Since the manuscript leaf is fragmentary, it is not known whether the composition was more extensive before the page was broken along the left side (figure 45.3). What remains, depicted in confidently economical brush-strokes, is a group of six figures. Five of the figures wear helmets. Four must be charioteers for they wear red or blue padded vests over their long, tight-fitting blue or red shirts. One of them carries a horsewhip. On his right, another relatively well-preserved figure, also helmeted and wearing a tight-fitting green jacket but without a protective vest, touches the charioteer's arm in a gesture of familiarity. This may represent another charioteer or, perhaps, an attendant.

The lively, casual style of the painting is well suited to the self-possessed, athletic bearing of the charioteers and to the expectant atmosphere of the scene that is enhanced by the figures' shared looks. Behind the charioteers is the double line of a graphically rendered arch that would seem to delineate the vaulted passageway through which they have just entered the racetrack. At such a moment, excited crowds would have greeted charioteers with the roar of their cheers. Without doubt, successful charioteers were superstars among athletes. Dio Chrysostom, writing around the turn of the second century, described Alexandrian spectators flinging their clothes in excited abandon at charioteers, then “departing naked from the show” (as in Humphrey 1986: 511). This zeal continued throughout Late Antiquity as poems were written about them and statues erected in their honor. Fans associated in factions with teams known by the colors worn by their Charioteers: the most famous and long-lived were the Blues and Greens; the other two teams were the Reds and Whites. (The Whites may have been represented on the left side of this composition before it was damaged.) These color-coded teams competed in racecourses across the Empire. Factions were empire-wide as well. Even the emperor had to favor a color, although it does not seem to have mattered which, with financial support and leverage for recruitment. This practice further linked circus entertainment to politics and to the potential volatility of agitated mobs. The first mention of factions in Alexandria is dated to 315; in a late mention dated to the early seventh century, a bishop John of Nikiu



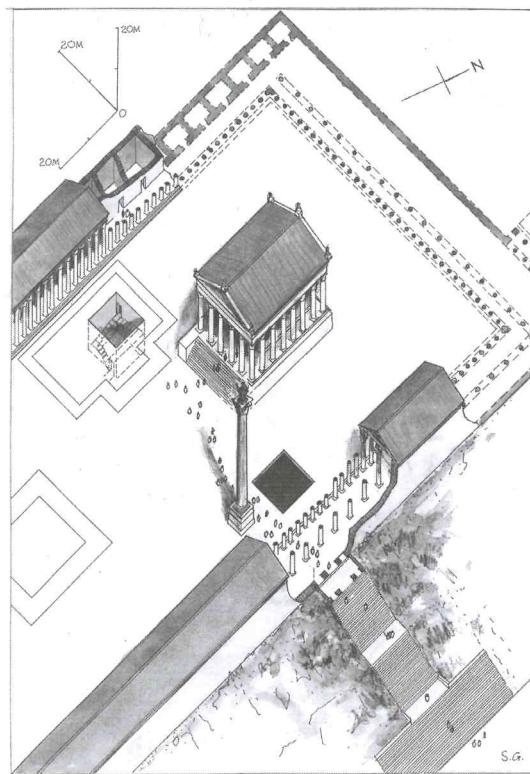
**Figure 45.3** Charioteer papyrus, from Antinoe, c.500. After Weitzmann: 1977; Courtesy the Egypt Exploration Society.

(a town in the Delta) wrote of murderous violence between Blue and Green factions in Egypt on the eve of the Sassanian Persian invasion of 611.

Events within hippodromes were never far from affairs of state or political demonstrations. The *Lageion* received imperial funding when, following a destructive fire, it was rebuilt by the emperor Zeno (ruled 474–91). The hippodromes in Rome, Constantinople, and Antioch were incorporated within imperial palace complexes. More generally, in Late Antiquity, decrees were read and posted in such public venues, and this was where imperial subjects voiced their requests to the emperor, and where the assembled crowds could be incited to riot. Spectacles presented in hippodromes included political punishments, in which prisoners might be forced to perform sacrifices to the traditional gods or be put to death. Executions were sometimes done on a massive scale and even presented as theatrical displays: this was the context of Roman persecutions of Jews and Christians.

### *Temples pompous with lofty roofs*

At the highest point on a hill overlooking the hippodrome, was the Serapeum, a defining feature of Alexandrian topography (figure 45.4). The fourth-century historian, Ammianus Marcellinus wrote of a cityscape studded with “temples



**Figure 45.4** Alexandria, Temple of Serapis, after 298, axonometric reconstruction. Sheila Gibson, after McKenzie: 2007.

pompous with lofty roofs" and commented that "conspicuous among them is the Serapeum, which ... is so adorned with extensive columned halls, with almost breathing statues, and a great number of other works of art, that next to the Capitolium, with which revered Rome elevates herself to eternity, the whole world beholds nothing more magnificent" (McKenzie 2007: 245). This was the acropolis of Alexandria.

One entered the Serapeum by an imposing flight of steps, which led up to the great rectangular portico enclosing a courtyard in which were a pool, stairs down to underground passageways, a Nilometer (an ancient instrument for measuring the height of the inundation of the Nile), and the main temple, which was dedicated to Serapis and housed the renowned colossal cult statue of the god. One Christian visitor of the later fourth century, Rufinus of Aquileia, described optical feats utilizing the advanced scientific knowledge Alexandria had been famous for since Ptolemaic times, such that, for example, the mouth of the statue would seem to be kissed by a ray of sunlight. Accommodated in rooms behind the portico were smaller shrines, living quarters of priests, and library study rooms for interested scholars.

### *Imperial imagery*

An indisputably conspicuous Late Antique addition to the Serapeum, just inside the entrance beyond the main stairway, was the imposing portrait of the emperor Diocletian (285–305). Postumus, then prefect of the city, erected the honorific column of red granite on which was placed the portrait statue of purple porphyry. Late Antique aesthetics appreciated such vibrant color combinations and the lustrous surfaces made possible by polishing hard stones. An inscription on the column commemorated Diocletian's rule, his visit to the city, and his suppression of a revolt instigated by the previous prefect. Today, only the column remains and it is now popularly mistakenly called "Pompey's Pillar." It is possible that fragments of a porphyry sculpture found nearby belonged to the portrait statue of Diocletian. Clearly, Diocletian showed a marked fondness for the material. Quarried only at Mons Porphyrites in Egypt, it was another of Egypt's prestige exports. The distinctive deep purple hue of porphyry had been associated since the first century with Roman imperial status; however, during the rule of Diocletian and his successors, it came to be employed for portraits, funerary monuments, and other imperial monuments to a greater extent than ever before. In Alexandria several Late Antique imperial portraits in porphyry have been found in or near public spaces.

Imperial portraits had since the time of Augustus been replicated for prominent placement in public places. Much like the urban amenities of public architecture and even the gridded street plan in which the buildings were placed, displays of imperial portraits were visual signs of Roman culture and Roman rule. By Late Antiquity the accumulation of imperial images in public places was an ancient, still effective mechanism for expressing both imperial succession and continuity of imperial rule, as well as the particular ideology of a given emperor (Kiss 1984).

Diocletian's imperial ideology developed within the context of his notable administrative successes: his reorganization of provincial governance and regulation of the economy, his pacification of the rebellious army, achieved in part by enlarging and favoring it, and his curtailment of barbarian incursions by strengthening Roman military presence along the far-flung borders of the Empire. He also undertook a comprehensive reorganization of imperial rule, following a strategy of dividing the Empire into eastern and western halves, each half governed by a co-emperor, called an *Augustus*, and his junior colleague, called a *Caesar*. This was the basis for the Late Antique tetrarchic system. What art history has dubbed "tetrarchic style" is the adaptation to tetrarchic imperial policy and ideology of a formulaic, yet powerfully expressive way of rendering a mature, experienced military authority that had been utilized for portraits of earlier soldier emperors. Two well-known group portraits of tetrarchs carved of porphyry present definitive examples of this style. One set, dating c. 300, is in the Vatican in Rome and the other, dating c. 306–7, is now embedded on an exterior corner of San Marco in Venice (figure 45.5). Each example pairs two tetrarchs on a column. Originally, each pair of columns would have been erected in a public place, much like the pre-tetrarchic statue of Diocletian on the column in the Serapeum.

Tetrarchic unity and divinity is on display in a room dedicated, c. 300, to the cult of the emperors in the renovated antechamber before the sanctuary of the New Kingdom Temple of Amun at Luxor, ancient Thebes, in Upper Egypt (figure 45.6). Newly

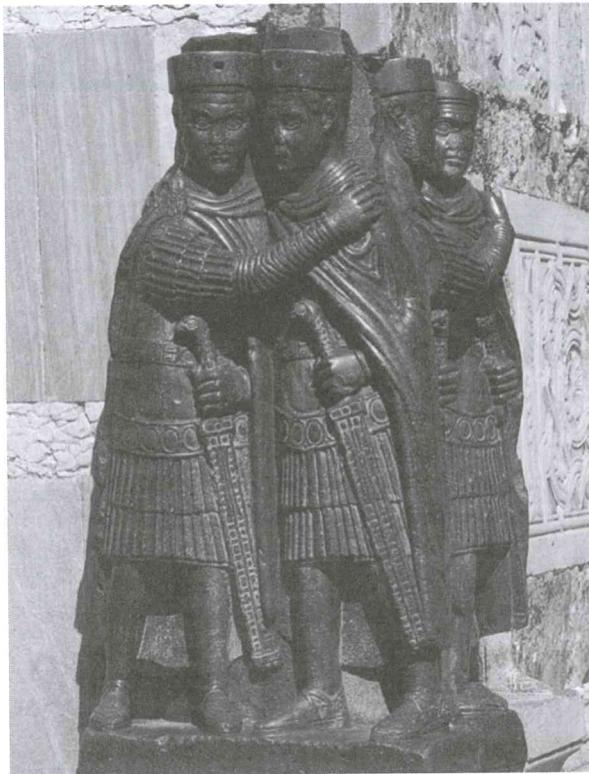
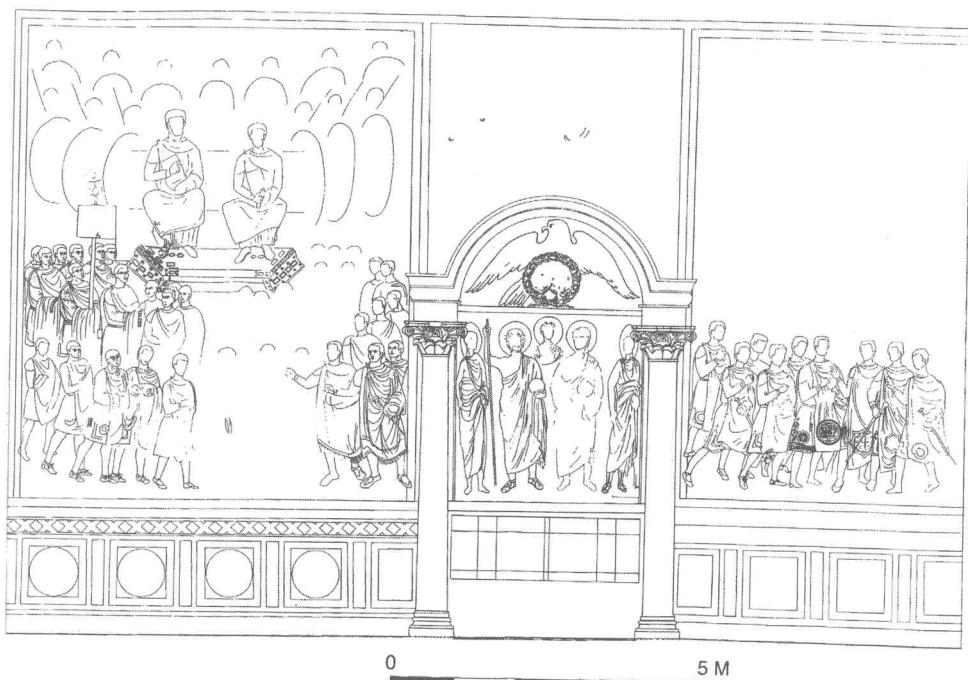


Figure 45.5 Group portrait of tetrarchs, porphyry, c.300, San Marco, Venice. Vanni/Art Resource, NY.

conserved paintings, their colors restored to vivid freshness, present an accomplished example of a more traditional realistic style also employed by the tetrarchic emperors. The lowest register of paintings mimics the inlay work of *opus sectile*, in which flat pieces of colored stones cut to shape were inlaid in the wall. Paintings on the upper levels of the south wall represent a ceremonial procession converging below an audience with co-rulers enthroned before a host of imperial soldiers. This two-zoned composition was likely echoed on the east side of the wall. Between these scenes and facing the central axis of the ancient temple was a specially constructed apse that was marked in front by four columns, which may have carried a stone canopy (baldachin). Painted in the vaulted conch of the apse was the colossal image of the eagle of Jupiter (Zeus), wings outstretched, holding in its claws an equally colossal wreath over a monumental group portrait of tetrarchic rulers, their heroic physiques only partially cloaked. They stand in paired groups separated by a bust-length figure of Jupiter in human form within a roundel placed slightly higher than the emperors' haloed heads.

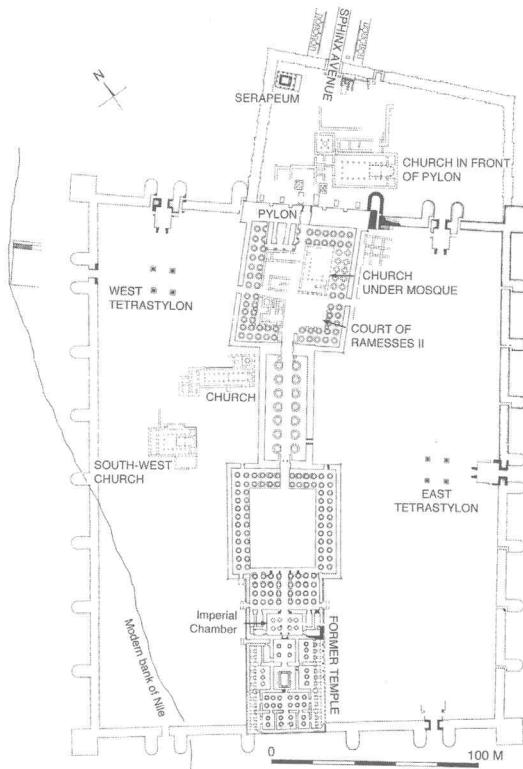
The divinity of ancient Egyptian kingship has been coopted in this display by reuse of the temple. For this tetrarchic-period renovation of the temple complex as a Roman military camp, a *castrum*, an enclosing, rectangular fortified wall with regularly spaced towers was constructed (figure 45.7). The space inside was crossed by a



**Figure 45.6** Thebes, former temple of Amun, Imperial Chamber, c.300, drawing of detail of wall paintings and niche in south wall. After McKenzie: 2007.

grid of streets determined by the main axis of the temple. Two monumental entrances in the new wall, allowing access for river traffic on the west and land traffic on the east, established subsidiary axes perpendicular to that along the length of the temple. Glorifying each of these entrances was an honorific monument consisting of four columns, called a *tetrastylon*, each with a tetrarchic group portrait, the one on the west dated to c. 300 and that on the east to c. 308. Altogether the reformulation of the temple complex as a *castrum* with the commanding up-to-date wall paintings in the chapel dedicated to the divine emperors presents a model of tetrarchic imperial ideology. Serial additions of tetrarchic portraits reflects an increasing insistence upon pomp, and elaboration of the apparatus for honoring emperors. Those who processed through the temple to the chapel would see their actions mirrored in the wall paintings there. Upon entry to the chapel they would note as well the “dramatic visual juxtaposition” of Ancient Egyptian and Roman artistic traditions (McFadden 2007: 98). Similar to the use of *spolia* in the hippodromes at Rome and Constantinople, this tetrarchic monument reflects a Late Antique aesthetic that is capable of incorporating ancient monuments for the expression of imperial aspirations to universality.

The concord and implacable divine authority expressed in tetrarchic portraits are contradicted by historical events. Internal power struggles among the tetrarchs led to effacements of portraits, acts of *damnatio memoriae*, which were deeds of such serious offence that the destruction by Constantine of one of Diocletian’s portraits



**Figure 45.7** Thebes, plan of military castrum incorporating former temple of Amun with Late Antique churches. After McKenzie: 2007.

reputedly compelled Diocletian to suicide (Ellingsen 2003: 32). One matter of contention, a critical failure of Diocletian's rule, was his continuation of a century-long series of government-sponsored persecutions of Christians and adherents of other religions suspected of being insufficiently patriotic. The Great Persecution, instigated by Diocletian in 303 and promulgated by a series of edicts until 311, the year of his death, had such a profound impact in Egypt that to this day the Calendar of the Egyptian Coptic Church begins with the year of Diocletian's accession to the throne (284), and is known as *The Era of Martyrs, Anno Martyrum*. It is no wonder that the portrait statue of Diocletian erected in the Serapeum does not survive.

### 3 Christianity and Empire: New Rome

In 313 the co-emperors Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Toleration, legalizing Christianity throughout the Empire. Ultimately, Constantine wrested control from his co-rulers to achieve sole rule of the empire in 324 and become the first Christian emperor. Although he was not baptized until shortly before his death in 337, his extraordinary support for the Church was instrumental in bringing

Christianity into the public sphere. Whereas most Christian meetings had been held in fairly small, private settings, like that exemplified in the house church preserved at Dura Europos in Syria (Krautheimer 1986: 27, fig.1), Constantine helped establish a public Christianity, in part by building churches and shrines on a monumental scale and adapting a type of imperial public architecture known as the basilica (a large, rectangular building, frequently apsed, in which legal, administrative, and commercial business was conducted). Constantine was not the originator of this trend in church building, but his use of the form lent an imperial association and *de facto* sanction to early basilica churches, which housed the burgeoning Christian population and provided an appropriate setting for the evolving performance of the liturgy (prescribed ceremonies); they also came to occupy significant positions within Roman cityscapes. In Rome, for example, Constantine built the new cathedral (the church of the highest-ranking ecclesiastical position of a city), St. John the Lateran, on imperial property. In the capital city Constantine founded on the site of ancient Byzantium, his New Rome, he set aside space for the new cathedral dedicated to Holy Wisdom, Hagia Sophia, in the very heart of the city among the grandest public buildings and right next to the old acropolis. New Rome, called Constantinople or Constantine's city, vied for prominence with old Rome and Alexandria in part by the construction of grand public spaces and architecture, and in part by the increasing enlargement of the role of the city within the emerging Church.

Constantine's support of the Church advanced the development of a hierarchical administration based on the territorial and civic governance of the Empire, but this organization of the early Church did not prevent the emergence of sectarian divisions, which were rooted both in local cultures and in doctrinal issues. Especially divisive were debates concerning the nature (in Greek, *physis*) of Christ. In 451, over five hundred bishops attended the Council of Chalcedon (a city just across the Bosphorus from Constantinople) convoked by the emperor Marcian (450–457), which decreed a Dyophysite statement of Christ's two (*dyo*) natures. Thirteen Egyptian bishops refused to stray from the Monophysite doctrine (Christ has one nature: Man-God) decreed by the Council of Nicaea in 431. From this turning point the Monophysite Egyptian Coptic Church developed within interconnected strands of religious beliefs and politics, but, despite the schismatic position of the native Egyptian church, Alexandria, an Apostolic See founded by Saint Mark, remained a key participant in the development of the early Christian doctrine.

#### 4 Transforming the Sacred in Cityscapes

During the course of the fourth century, as churches were integrated into public urban space, churches became essential to the *kallos* of the Christian Roman city. Two of the earliest Christian buildings in Alexandria, a shrine dedicated to Saint Mark and the first church of Patriarch Theonas (282–300), had been located at the eastern and western extremities of the city. Within residential areas there were other smaller structures belonging to Christians, but the erection of magnificent churches within the heart of the city did not occur until after the legalization of Christianity. In the first

instance, under Patriarch Alexander (312–328), the Caesareum was converted into the cathedral dedicated to Saint Michael. More churches were constructed in Alexandria during the long, stormy tenure of Patriarch Athanasius (328–373). Unfortunately, we know of the earliest Christian churches in Alexandria mainly from texts because so little archaeological evidence survives. There is a similar paucity of archaeological evidence for Alexandria's large and influential Jewish community; it is possible that the basilica form was taken up for Late Antique Alexandrian synagogue architecture (as at Sardis, in Asia Minor) much as we know from archaeological evidence it was adapted for church architecture elsewhere in Egypt. Some structures, like the Church of Theonas, were destroyed during persecutions of Christians. Others were destroyed by subsequent periods of violence between Christians and Jews, and between Christian sects. Later warfare and rebuilding are responsible for other erasures. In many ways, the meagre archaeological record is the result of the hazards of continuing urban existence.

The placement of religious monuments and the character of religious experience changed drastically during Late Antiquity. Public architecture – such as baths, theaters and hippodromes as well as temple precincts – had long been used as venues for presenting sacrifices to traditional gods. However, over the course of Late Antiquity the continuation of Egyptian and other “pagan” cult practices came to be conducted within the private sphere (Frankfurter 1998b). At first, with the emergence of Christianity into the public sphere, there was competition for centers of cult within the cityscape. Ultimately, temples lost imperial support, temple building ceased, and hostility toward the existence of temples increased. Often the Christianization of a place involved overturning prior sacrality, which happened both by cooption and by force.

The destruction of temples in and around Alexandria may be exemplified by the dramatic events surrounding the violent end of the Serapeum at the close of the fourth century, as visualized so evocatively in one painted marginal image, not surprisingly the one most often selected for reproduction from among the sixteen painted, now fragmentary, leaves of a manuscript in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow. It is known as the Alexandrian World Chronicle because it tells the history of the world from the perspective of Alexandria (also known by the name of its collector as the Golenishev Papyrus). The manuscript has been assigned dates between the fifth and seventh centuries. The text was written not in Greek, but in Coptic, the last phase of the Egyptian language utilizing the Greek alphabet with additional letters for sounds not used in Greek. In this carefully painted scene Theophilus is shown initiating, overseeing, or celebrating the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria, which did indeed take place under his aegis while he served as Patriarch of Alexandria (385–412) and in accord with the anti-pagan legislation and policies of Theodosius I. One decree of 391 forbidding entry into sanctuaries and temples had the result of allowing many temples to be declared “abandoned,” although this did not always occur without protest. At one point defenders of an “abandoned” temple in Alexandria barricaded themselves inside the Serapeum with Christian hostages, some of whom they forced to make sacrifices; others they tortured and killed. Theodosius decided that Theophilus should pardon the offenders but should destroy the temple images, thereby initiating an early example of state-sponsored Christian iconoclasm.

This marginal scene from the *Alexandrian World Chronicle* clearly does not simply narrate historical events. Instead it asserts symbolically the exalted status of

Theophilus and the superiority of Christianity over paganism. "Holy Theophilus," identified by inscription, is represented standing on the blue roof of a small structure, which must depict the temple of the god. The roof, supported by a yellow and blue architrave, is supported in turn by whitish columns and capitals. Inside the notably dark atmosphere of the temple is the intact, even darker brown cult statue of Serapis, exemplar of Graeco-Egyptian syncretistic religion, identified by the attribute on top of his head, the *modius*, a basket for measuring grain and a fertility symbol of Greek origin, indicative of the rich harvests brought by Serapis's power over the Nile flood and of his associations to Greek and Egyptian fertility gods. The scene is only partially preserved and has suffered enough damage for it to be difficult to discern details of the clothing of the statue, but it does seem that the garments of the cult statue and those of Theophilus are linked by color scheme so as to underscore both the equivalence of the figures and their contest. The statue's cloak appears to be yellowish with reddish ornamental bands, whereas Theophilus is depicted in fancy dress of similar contrasting colors, a yellow (gold?) tunic under a purplish cloak embellished with blue at the neckline. In one hand, covered by his cloak, he carries a brown codex with a white cross on the cover. The other arm, held away from the body, is bent so that his hand points up. From the "ground" at either side of his feet spring well-formed, elegantly curling branches, their leafiness perhaps emblems of the fertility of the land that continued despite the evident demise of Serapis and the termination of his cult. Unfortunately, damage has obliterated the rest of the composition that may have continued to the right, obscuring any relation of this composition to other scenes placed along the bottom and side margins of this page.

The destruction of the Serapeum in 391 and the subsequent construction of a shrine dedicated to Saint John the Baptist near the site mark defining moments in the Christian conversion of the cityscape. There is variety, however, in the evidence for abandonment and preservation, reuse, destruction, and replacement of temples. By way of contrast, the round temple dedicated to the Fortune (*Tyche*) of Alexandria, the Tychaion, not only flourished throughout most of the fourth century largely because of its centrality to municipal governance, but its secularization in 391 appears to have been a factor in the preservation of its statues of pagan gods, pre-Christian rulers, and philosophers (Haas 1997: 167; Gibson 2007). The replacement of another fixture of Alexandrian identity bears mention: although the renowned Museum was destroyed in 415 in one of the episodes of mob violence that convulsed the city, the construction of the auditoria at Kom el-Dikka attests to ongoing public endorsement of Alexandria as an intellectual center.

Outside of Alexandria there is much better archaeological evidence for the inclusion of Christianity in urban settings by the building of multiple churches. At Thebes, for example, one church was built in front of the first pylon of the temple of Amun outside the *castrum*, another within what had been the Court of Ramesses II, and two more to the west of the temple but still within the *castrum*. In the southern frontier zone shared with Nubia, on the island of Philai, the first room of the Temple of Isis was converted into a church, and other churches were constructed on the island even as temples continued to attract pilgrims (Dijkstra 2005).

The adaptation of ancient tradition is evident in the reuse of ancient spaces and buildings on other Egyptian cities. At Hermopolis Magna in the mid-third century,

for example, the heart of city was given a monumental marker in the form of a *tetrastylon* at the junction the two main colonnaded streets (see above, p. 1042). In the mid-fifth century the large cathedral for the city was built in a corner of this intersection, incorporating its two monumental porticos and courtyard within the system of colonnaded streets, thereby further monumentalizing the area and, in the relationship between courtyard, central spaces, and subsidiary peripheral rooms, even correcting the asymmetry of the earlier temple enclosure it replaced (Török 2006a: fig. 1, p. 248). Here, careful siting and construction were symbolic in their “super-scription of pagan cult with Christian worship” (Török, 2006a: 254).

## 4 Church Architecture

Although the liturgies of different early Christian sects differed in details, they had in common the regular, weekly celebration of the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist, or Communion, in which the consecrated offerings of bread and wine were distributed to those who had been baptized into the faith for their ritual consumption in commemoration of Christ’s Last Supper with his apostles and of Christ’s passion and death. Church structures developed to house the external actions of this liturgy. Throughout the Empire of New Rome, these fundamental requirements came to be accommodated by an apsed space for the sanctuary, in which the altar was located and to which only clergy were admitted, a larger nave space for the assembled congregation, and, articulating the distinction between these spaces, a low barrier that did not restrict visibility or interaction between clergy and congregants. Regional variation in the formation and layout of these features is not absolute. Thus, characteristic features of Syrian or Aegean church planning, for example, are found in Egyptian church architecture. Indeed, the role of Alexandria in the development of Late Antique architectural style outside of Egypt is a subject of current debate (McKenzie 2007).

The southeast church in Kellis, in the Dakhla Oasis, dating perhaps as early as the Constantinian period, preserves the core set of features of much of early Egyptian church architecture (see Grossmann 2007: 106, fig. 6.2). At the eastern end, the floor of the semi-circular apse is raised above the level of the floor of the rectangular nave, and a low *pi*-shaped balustrade extends the sanctuary space in front of the apse. The wooden frame of this chancel barrier may have held glass panels made of fragments found at the site (Bolman 2006b). The apse is flanked on each side by a small room; a side entrance in the apse wall leads into the southern room. Apse, side chambers (*pastophoria*, rooms used by the clergy for their preparations), and an alignment of additional small rooms all along the southern side were enclosed within flat exterior walls. Inside, a single, continuous colonnade around all four sides of the rectangular nave, divides the long rectangular space into a main central aisle and two narrower side aisles. On the shorter east side of the rectangle, the line of columns defined a transverse aisle that was part of the sanctuary. This church is known as the Eastern Church as there was a second church very close by.

There was considerable improvisation in the arrangement of these features. Centrally planned churches (so designated in contrast to the long axial planning of

basilicas) are found mainly in the north of Egypt. At Pelusium a church dated to the middle or later fifth century presents a round nave articulated by a continuous circular colonnade (Grossman 2007: 119, fig. 6.10). As was common in Egypt by the mid-fifth century, the episcopal church of Hermopolis Magna took the form of a basilica with an apsed sanctuary and central and flanking aisles delineated by a colonnade. Above the aisles was a gallery level that overlooked the nave. Unusual for Egypt is the transept, a feature often found in Italian and Mediterranean churches, that here extends out from the sanctuary in two arms ending in apses. The colonnade continues all the way around the nave and transept arms. Another distinctive feature is the crypt below the apse.

Crypt below apse and continuous colonnade articulating nave and transept space are all elements used in later phases of the Martyr Church at the extensive pilgrimage complex now called Abu Mina, dedicated to St Menas, who was martyred during the Great Persecution (figure 45.8). The first phase of construction, apparently in the fourth century, created a niched tomb at the underground burial place of St Menas. Successive structures above ground were increasingly grand: a freestanding mausoleum, replaced at some time in the mid-sixth century with a shrine and the Martyr Church, in which a continuous colonnade delineated a four-lobed shape called a tetriconch, a form otherwise unknown in Egypt although well-attested in Syria and other areas of the Empire. A baptistery was built at the westernmost end of the church and, to the east, the late fifth- or early sixth-century basilica called the Great Church, which is the largest Egyptian church to survive from this period. The Great Church is unusual for its projecting apse and three-aisled transept – features attested mainly in Asia Minor and Greece (Grossman 2007: 115). The eastern lobe of the colonnade in the Martyr Church intersects with an oval colonnade in the narthex of the Great Church, linking the two churches together as one tremendously impressive complex.

## 5 Settings for Pilgrimage: Pilgrimage Art

By the mid-sixth century the pilgrimage center of St Menas had grown into a miniature city in extent, in its use of elements of urban planning and public architecture, and in the locations of distinct populations. There was a semi-circular courtyard on the south side of the crypt church for incubation (the practice of sleeping in proximity to a sacred place or relics in order to effect a cure). On the north and the east sides arranged around rectangular courtyards were buildings to house those working at the site. Another church, known as the Northern Basilica, has been interpreted as serving an anti-Chalcedonian community, in contrast to the Chalcedonians elsewhere at the site (Grossmann 1998b: 295). A small monastic settlement seems to have been located at the eastern edge of the city near another church. North of the great church complex were more ecclesiastical and administrative buildings lodgings for travelers (*xenodocheia*), public baths, and a colonnaded, processional street leading to a multi-use area consisting of residences, tombs of those able to arrange burial near the saint, and installations for light industry, such as wine presses and the pottery workshops that produced the clay flasks (*ampullae*) that pilgrims



Abb. 2 Gesamtanlage von Abū Minā

**Figure 45.8** Pilgrimage center of St Menas (Abu Mina), overall plan, mid-sixth century. After Grossmann: 1998. Copyright Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden.

acquired as special souvenirs and which contained oil or water sanctified by proximity to or contact with the remains of the saint.

Menas flasks are impressed on one side with the image of the saint, identified by inscription as “Holy Menas” and represented standing with his arms raised in prayer between two kneeling camels. The scene, a visual reference to the episode in one of the saint’s legends when camels bearing his body refused to travel any farther, having recognized his burial place, can be difficult to decipher on these humble artifacts. The image of Menas is more clearly delineated on a carved, round ivory box (*pyxis*) of the



Figure 45.9 Ivory pyxis with Saint Menas, sixth century. The British Museum, M&ME 1879,12-20, 1AN34975001; Trustees of the British Museum. (1449).

sixth century (figure 45.9), found in the early Christian Church of San Paolo Fuori le Mure in Rome, and now in the British Museum (Buckton 1994: 74). On one side Menas is shown after his martyrdom, in an apse-like place of honor, indicated by the columns flanking him and the arch they support, in turn flanked by kneeling camels; Menas is haloed and suitably dressed for a soldier from a wealthy family in a rich cloak (*chlamys*) with the square insignia indicating high rank (*tablion*). Two women approaching from the left, and two men from the right, converge on the scene; they, too, are richly dressed. On the other side is a rare depiction of Menas wearing only a loincloth at the moment before his martyrdom. Inexpensive clay flasks made in multiple batches and a singular expensive ivory box including portraits of commissioner(s) and probably meant as a votive offering give some idea of the wide range of society that undertook pilgrimages and the strong need all felt to commemorate both the act of pilgrimage and the goal (Frankfurter 1998a).

Abu Mina is just one, albeit the largest by far, of the many early Christian shrines near and in Alexandria commemorating prophets, apostles, martyrs and other saints. In the late fourth century the Virgin Mary revealed to the Patriarch Theophilus places visited by the Holy Family on the Flight into Egypt. Theophilus recorded all he saw

and heard, and the Holy Family's sojourn across northern Sinai to Pelusium, sites across the Delta down to the Roman fortress at Babylon (now in Old Cairo), and other sites in Middle and Upper Egypt, became part of the network of pilgrimage routes across the Holy Land (Gabra 2001). Also in the late fourth-century, a nun now known as Egeria described sites in southern Sinai associated with the Old Testament, and particularly Exodus. She wrote of her experiences on the arduous trek and the holy sites she saw for her "sisters," possibly fellow nuns, back at home. She visited places that stood as testimonies to Christian history. These were natural features of the landscape, such as the cave where the prophet Elijah took shelter and the bush that had burned with God's presence, which she saw still thriving in a garden near a church. At these special places, she read appropriate scriptural passages and prayed with her guides and the local monks. Egeria mentioned only briefly the architecture at these places; interestingly, she described no buildings enclosing the *loca sancta* she visited. Nor does the architecture seem to have been commemorative in character or in the functions it served. In Egeria's account, churches were visited so that she might benefit from a local monk-priest's performance of a partial or full celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy.

## 6 Settings for Monasticism: Monastic Art

Monasticism intensified the focus of Christian life on the forging of personal relationships to God through ascetic behavior. Withdrawal from worldly life in order to do so was a well-known trope for the setting of monastic life even before literary celebrations of Egypt's most famed monks cast them as "Desert Fathers." Yet, this "desert" was conceptual (Goehring 2003), referring to any space where ascetics could practice austerity, center their lives on prayer, and model their behavior after that of Christ, the prophets, and angels. This could happen in the separate space of the monastic cell, within the walls of a monastery, within monasteries in urban settings or those in the relatively uninhabited arid terrain on the outskirts of settlements. In Upper Egypt, in Western Thebes, monks settled in and around ancient tombs, inhabiting the liminal space of the cemetery where the presence of demons was particularly strong (O'Connell 2007). In all these places monks worked to transform themselves spiritually by control of their bodily actions and their thoughts, even their outward dress. Monastic settlement provided an alternative to secular government, the valorization of personal wealth and status, and other worldly seductions of cities. Indeed, monastic community was often characterized in opposition to urban existence. For example, the monastic founder, Shenoute, described the nearby city of Panopolis as a stage for social displays and a place for entertainment, and characterized the beauty of the city as cosmetic, the beauty of mere outward appearance as opposed to the true, inner beauty of the monastery, which was like the heavenly city of Jerusalem (Behlmer 2002). In the *Historia Monachorum* and other monastic literature, the city was often cast in the role of the harlot (certainly prostitutes were found in cities) opposite the role of the monastery as a type of paradise.

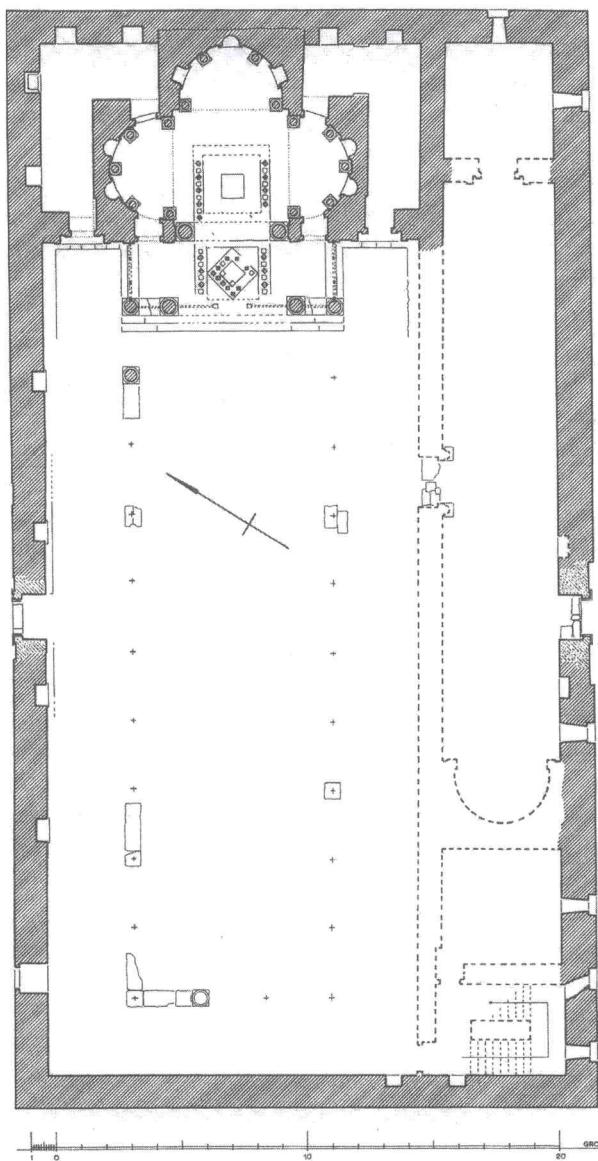
This vision of the monastic setting was not only spiritual and conceptual but was enacted by monks who flocked to desert locales throughout Egypt. Just as the terrain

on and around Mount Sinai was dotted with monastic establishments, so was the countryside southeast of Alexandria, in Kellia, replete with monks. The remains of hundreds of early Christian monastic dwellings have been found there, and hundreds more nearby in Nitria and Scetis (the Wadi Natrun). Visually, conceptually as well as experientially, this was a striking transformation of the desert.

Different types of monastic architecture developed to accommodate varieties of monasticism, from that of the isolated hermit, or anchorite, to loosely organized semi-anchoritic settlements, to large coenobitic ("shared-life") communities (*koinoniai*), organized hierarchically into well-structured administrations with written rules (Gabra 2002). Within coenobitic monasteries monks took up the habit (*skhema*), prescribed dress identifying them as part of the community. One example of coenobitic monasticism is provided by the federation of three neighboring monasteries, two for men and one for women, of Apa (meaning both father and abbot) Shenoute (348–464 or 6). Each monastery in Shenoute's federation was self-sufficient. Until recently the architectural elements and their layout were known mainly from texts, but current archaeological investigations are uncovering important confirmatory evidence of these settings for the labors of monastic life. Within monastery walls were: gatehouse, dormitory "houses," workshops, dining hall, bakery and kitchen, infirmary, laundry, storehouse, library and scriptorium and, of course, a church. Each house contained an assembly-hall for prayer and handwork, and other workshops. Outside the walls, agricultural activities took place in the monasteries' fields, gardens and orchards.

The surviving fifth-century basilica churches for two of the federation monasteries share plans and elevations (Grossmann 2007). These churches are often called the Red and White Monasteries (named in part after the colors of their brick and limestone building materials and the fact that these very large churches serve as monastic enclosures for present-day monks). The churches are also known after the names of illustrious leaders, Apa Bishay (320–417) and Apa Shenoute (348–464 or 6). From the exterior, the profile is rectangular and blocky, with massive walls sloping inward and topped by a cavetto (concave, curving) cornice, thus reminiscent of the exterior ancient Egyptian temple (Bolman 2006a: 260, fig. 1). The walls are pierced by windows, which, originally, provided light and air for the interior. Inside, ornamental niches further articulated the walls. In plan, the church has a central nave flanked by two aisles delineated by a return colonnade supporting a gallery (figure 45.10). To the east, the central arch before the sanctuary is wider and taller than the two flanking arches leading to the pastophoria. Sanctuaries and pastophoria are again contained within flat exterior walls, as are subsidiary rooms along the east and south sides. (Libraries were preserved in two of the subsidiary rooms.) Both churches originally had triangular, pitched roofs over the naves, although now they are open to the sky. Sanctuaries shared a similar design as well: trilobed in plan, multistoried in elevation, each lobe topped by a semidome, the central, highest space originally covered by a conical or pyramidal roof, now spanned by a dome.

As part of a program to strengthen the frontiers of the empire, Justinian I (527–565) built a fortified monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai around the site of the Burning Bush (Nelson 2006). The church is a simple three-aisled basilica, with apse and pastophoria enclosed within the exterior wall (Forsyth 1965). A striking variation in this church plan is the number of small, private chapels within the church: three in



**Figure 45.10** Sohag, Church of the Red Monastery, plan, fifth century. Plan by P. Grossmann, after Grossmann, 2007. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

alignment on each side of the main body of the church, and two more beyond the pastophoria. The latter two originally embraced the Burning Bush, but with the loss of the bush this space was enclosed to form another, easternmost chapel. This multiplication of chapels would have accommodated private devotions of priest-monks and liturgical services performed for pilgrims (Mathews 1982).

Vast semi-anchoritic monastic settlements, as at Kellia, included buildings for single monks and for master-monks with one or two disciples. Many of these buildings were

economically arranged, placing the elder monk farthest from the shared space of a courtyard, where rooms for visitors might be located, and the disciple's room nearest the kitchen. Ornamentation, consisting of crosses of various shapes and designs, was centered on the prayer niche in the courtyard. There was a similar focus on imagery to guide prayer painted in niches and church apses in the large communal Coptic monasteries of Apa Jeremias at Saqqara near the city of Memphis and Apa Apollo at Bawit near Hermopolis Magna. Elizabeth Bolman (1998; 2007) has shown how paintings within monastic cells at Bawit and Sakkara of angels, for example, and monastic exemplars, assisted monks in their meditations and in their efforts of imitation (*mimesis*) of their spiritual exemplars.

## 7 Church Decoration

Local traditions are employed in tandem with more widespread ornamental forms in Late Antique church decoration. For the fifth-century cathedral at Hermopolis Magna blocks from earlier local structures were reused within the foundation, but visible ornamental features of the capitals were in the Graeco-Roman tradition, including red-granite columns reused in the nave and limestone Corinthian capitals carved in up-to-date forms as found in cities of Greece, Italy, as well as in the capital city of Constantinople. In the round church at Pelusium Proconnesian marble capitals combining small Ionic volute scrolls and finely carved acanthus undercut to create densely shadowed surfaces appear to be imports from Constantinople (Grossmann 2007: 122). From the Monastery of Apa Jeremias locally developed forms, such as palm or lotus capitals, were used alongside Corinthian and other forms of the Graeco-Roman repertory. Here, however, the capitals preserve painted details, such as shadows and veining in leaves, and a great deal of strong color, the application of which was not restricted to naturalistic patterns (McKenzie 2007: 308, figs 516–17). Other richly carved features include, for example, doors, cornices, and chancel barriers of stone and wood, often bearing traces of polychromy (Thomas 1989).

Glass ornamenting architectural settings could be used to similar extra-ordinary effect. The inlaid glass (called intarsia, in which flat pieces of a colored material are pieced together to form a larger composition) of the fourth century, now in the Corning Museum of Glass (plate 33), is an example of virtuoso craftsmanship in which all motifs are defined by their lustrous colors and the precisely formed shapes of their glass pieces (Auth 2007). Clearly, each piece was made to order for this commission. At the center of this fragmentary panel is preserved part of the head in profile of a figure identified by inscription as "Thomas." The proximity of the large, yellow letters of the inscription to the more diminutive scale of the pinkish-beige figure make all the more striking the delicate intricacy of the small and precisely shaped pieces of glass fitted together to form the curving black lines of his intently focused, deeply set brown eye below the arching line of his furrowed brow, each distinct whirled lock of purple and white in his beard, and the streaked locks of hair on his head. Interestingly, the use of colors for the figure is more vibrant and forceful than the sensitively rendered lines of the drawing of the figure.

There is no evidence for the original size of this panel when it was complete (currently 79 inches long) or the extent of the overall composition to which it belonged, but, even as a fragment, this panel provides a glimpse of Late Antique interest in playful alternation between two- and three-dimensional spatiality. The solidity of the wall behind this compelling vision of the cross was made to disappear, effectively nullified by the shining, colorful surface of the glass inlay and by the fictive architecture (framing what would have been a symmetrical composition). Deliberate spatial indeterminacy is enhanced by the deep light-absorbing blue of the background, between, on the right, the shimmering gold cross (*crux monogrammata*) of comparatively large and simply cut pieces of glass within a medallion of a thin red band between thicker, bright yellow bands and, on the left, an Ionic column capital with red and white scrolled volutes flanking short vertical lines of red, yellow, and green. The remaining capital does not quite meet (and, therefore, does not support what appears to be) an entablature, represented by straight bands all along the top of the panel: from bottom to top, white, red, yellow, brown, white, and red. Comparison to an example of *opus sectile* (in which flat pieces of colored stones are cut into shapes for inlay in designs) at Abu Mina, in the pavement for the tomb church (McKenzie 2007: 291, fig. 484), of similar composition illustrates how skilfully the glass artist manipulated light and dark, contrasting and related colors, and variations in brightness and lustre.

In contrast to the inlay work described above, the technique of mosaic uses stone and glass pieces (*tesserae*) of fairly uniform square shape and small size to achieve a similar effect. Wall and ceiling mosaics, which began to flourish in the fourth century, the best-known architectural use of glass during Late Antiquity, are rarely attested in Egyptian monuments. Gold glass tesserae in the tomb church at Abu Mina suggest that the sixth-century dome was covered in mosaic work. The only completely preserved composition is found in the Justinianic church on Mount Sinai, in the apse and extending up the eastern wall (Nelson 2006: 24, fig. 31). Medallions frame the apse. Most contain bust-length portraits of apostles and prophets, but the central medallion above Christ's head contains a haloed cross, and portraits of contemporary figures are placed at crucial points: Justinian at the center of the lower border and, anchoring the two corners, portraits of contemporary local leaders of the church and monastery, John the Deacon and Longinus the Abbot. Within the apse is a glowing scene of the Transfiguration of Christ: the vision witnessed by the apostles Peter, John, and James on Mount Tabor just prior to the Crucifixion. The transfigured Christ is revealed in his divinity, conversing with Moses and Elijah, two prophets associated with revelations of God on Mount Sinai. Multiple elements of this extended composition connect the ongoing local monastic tradition to the Biblical history of the site and link epiphanies at the site to the apostles' epiphany on Mount Tabor and, indeed, to epiphanic experience. As concerns the sacrament of communion, for example, the faithful understood the Holy Spirit was a real presence in the church, and that the consecrated offerings of bread and wine were mystically transformed into the body and blood of Christ. Portrayals of Christ in the sanctuary confirmed these beliefs visually.

An important, long-term conservation program at the Coptic monastic church of Apa Bishay in Sohag has revealed several layers of wall painting in the northern lobe of



**Figure 45.11** Sohag, Church of the Red Monastery, view into northern lobe of sanctuary. Three layers of paintings dating between late fifth or sixth century and c.800 AD. Photograph taken after completion of conservation except in sections of the ground floor and clerestory. Photograph Patrick Godeau; © American Research Center in Egypt. The Red Monastery Conservation Project was carried out by the American Research Center in Egypt with funding from the United States Agency for International Development in collaboration with the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities and the Coptic Orthodox Church.

the sanctuary (Bolman 2006a). Originally all of the sanctuary was painted: niches, architectural ornament, and walls. Inhabiting the middle zone of niches in the northern lobe is a Shenoutian monastic portrait gallery, reminding the monastic audience of their lineage and of the salvation to be gained by remembering their forefathers and following their examples (figure 45.11). In the apse above is an image of the mother of God nursing the infant Christ, again a Eucharistic reference but with a very different presentation of the Christ's human and divine nature and, therefore, the nature of his sacrifice for the salvation of humankind. This integrated scheme of polychromed architectural sculpture and painted walls included in the apse fictive architectural elements – painted columns and arches – building an elaborate architectural fantasy and extending the pictorial space behind the picture plane of the actual space of the apse.

The fragmentary remains of wall paintings in the later sixth-century church at Karm el-Ahbariya, just a few kilometers from Abu Mina, provide fascinating glimpse of

continuing interest in the emperor Constantine as a heroic figure, expanding upon a fourth-century biography (Witte-Orr 1993) with narrative scenes on the west wall emphasizing the role of the cross in Constantine's life. The Flight into Egypt and other narrative scenes from the life of Christ covered the south, west, and north walls. On the north and south walls were represented Old Testament prophets and saints.

## 8 Art and Architecture in the Private Sphere

Elaborate schemes of church decoration developed prior traditions of architectural decoration, much as preexisting structures and sites were adapted for the creation of Christian cityscapes. Similar adaptive processes were at work in the formation of settings for pilgrimage and monasticism; so, too, for artistic developments in the private sector.

### *Funerary art*

At several catacombs in Alexandria, as in the underground complexes near the Serapeum, tombs reused by Christians were painted with crosses and paradisical motifs, or more extensive Christian compositions with eucharistic allusions similar to those in church decorations. Paintings and inscriptions are found as well in large Christian mausolea at Bagawat in the Kharga Oasis. More humble tomb stones (*stelai*) were also inscribed, carved, and painted to commemorate the dead. In the tombs of wealthy polytheists and Christians, the vaulted heads of honorific wall niches were ornamented with painted sculptural decorations (Thomas 2000). Mythological subjects are associated with Dionysos, Herakles, Earth, and watery themes associated with Nile, Aphrodite, and nymphs, often in dynamic, asymmetrical compositions. There are, however, striking similarities between some of the Christian and mythological scenes in symmetrical compositions of nymphs riding dolphins echoed by similar arrangements of angels holding crosses. Moreover, Christian compositions could mark an existing motif with a cross, for example placing a cross on the hinge of a half-shell. Religious affiliations of other compositions cannot be determined for lack of a qualifying inscription or determining motif. Interestingly, although no explicitly Jewish examples can be identified in Egyptian contexts, similar formats in Palestine for the Jewish cemetery at Beth Shearim and the Christian cemetery at Shefarim suggest a broader use of these forms and merit further comparative study (Maayan-Fanar 2006).

### *Domestic architecture and its decoration*

There is archaeological evidence for dwellings of different social strata. In Alexandria, in Kom el-Dikka near the large public complex with the auditoria and baths, were affluent residences with their own private baths. Nearby were large multi-unit residences, several of which preserve on the ground floor evidence of small workshops for glassworking and bone- and ivory-carving. One trend in Late Antique urban

development is the subdivision of large houses into apartments. Another empire-wide trend is the multiplication of small markets throughout the cityscape. The building identified as House D exemplifies both trends (McKenzie 2007: 217, fig. 374). The entry to House D, from the main street known as R4, led into a long, rectangular courtyard around which were public rooms, including workshops. Stairs led from the courtyard to a second floor, where domestic quarters were located. On a wall in the courtyard is evidence of a Christian shrine for private use by those in the building: a very fragmentary painting of the enthroned Virgin, holding the Christ child on her lap and, to the left of the throne, a standing angel. Between the throne and the angel is the outline of a smaller (less than half-size) figure, apparently the donor of the painting (McKenzie 2007: 240, fig. 406). This painting, dated to the first half of the sixth century, is similar to Christian votive offerings in public settings such as the mosaic panels at the Church of Saint Demetrios in Thessalonike, Greece. As such a comparison might suggest, the role of devotional images in private and public settings as it developed throughout Late Antiquity was both multifaceted and complex.

Religious imagery in non-Christian domestic settings may reflect private devotional practice. Isis and Harpokrates, for example, are represented in their traditional Graeco-Egyptian forms in similarly modest dwellings in house B50E in Karanis in the Fayum, dating to the fourth century (Gazda 1983: 39, fig. 68) and in Amheida in the Dakhla Oasis in a house dated to the third century. Both houses were built of mud-brick, the most common material for domestic architecture in Late Antique Egypt. In both scenes the infant Harpokrates, identifiable by his sidelock and the finger at his mouth, is nursed by Isis, identifiable by her hairstyle of tiers of black curls and her knotted mantle. It has been suggested that these paintings display a more emphatic mixture of Greek and Egyptian cultural symbols than the more extensive set of paintings in a neighboring, grander house at Amheida, dated to the fourth century (Boozer 2007). Here, too, Harpokrates is represented, as is a female figure labeled *Polis*, ("city" in Greek) likely a personification of Amheida and intended to associate the owner with that city. Another scene, of a family at table, seems to reflect a trend toward the increasing elaboration of spaces for reception among the elite of Late Antiquity. The extensive series of mythological scenes among the wall-paintings in this house belong to a growing corpus of monumental paintings attesting to a long-lived tradition of illustrations of Greek myth that would seem on display the owner's educational attainment and social aspirations. There are no clear religious associations for narrative paintings of literary inspiration.

## 9 Icons

Although in Greek *eikon* means "image," the term is often used to refer specifically to small-scale painted devotional panels. A tradition of "pagan" icons has been proposed in reference paintings like the third- and fourth-century examples of Harpokrates described above, painted wooden panels with similar subjects, and mummy

portraits dating from the first to the third centuries (Rassart-Debergh 1990). Although mummy portraits were painted on wooden panels, they were inserted over the faces of the deceased within their mummy cases, portraying regular people, whose only claim to divinity was their transformed state after death. Panel-painted icons may be distinguished from mummy portraits by their use, method of construction, and subjects (Mathews 2006). There is, however archaeological evidence that the icons were buried with their owners, and placed in domestic shrines as votive gifts, similar to the above-mentioned Christian wall painting in Kom el-Dikka. Small donor figures are sometimes included in these compositions as in the chapel in Kom el-Dikka. Wooden frames surround the main panels. Some of these icons had movable side panels for concealment and revelation of their divine subjects. From the Graeco-Egyptian pantheon, these are haloed gods usually represented in human form, as half-length or full-length figures in fairly static poses with little or no indication of setting. About half of the known examples represent military deities, such as Heron. The next most commonly represented divinity is Isis, depicted as in the wall paintings at Amheida and Karanis.

Panel paintings, wall paintings, and mummy portraits all rely upon asymmetry, a device from the Graeco-Roman repertory to approximate naturalism and animation. As in life, eyes are not entirely level or the same size, nor is frontality absolute. Representations of divinities are unusually undistinguished in other ways, approaching the generic in their avoidance of representational formulas like those of contemporary mummy portraits, which achieve a documentary realism by use of such features as the wrinkles and moles capable of describing a person's appearance visually in much the same way as their mention in a written description in a legal document. Divinities are identified instead by their pose, dress, or other attributes: Isis by the tiered curls of her black hair and distinctively knotted mantle, for example, or Heron by his plated cuirass armor (covering chest, or chest and back) and double-headed ax. Such portrayals seem to have been designed to encourage prayerful dialogue between gods and humans in much the same way as the earliest Christian panel-painted icons, most of which are preserved in the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai. None of these earliest Christian icons can be securely dated before the middle of the sixth century. Despite that gap of several centuries between the latest of the panels of savior gods and the earliest of the Christian icons, common stylistic features and methods of construction suggest shared artistic traditions and, perhaps, affinities between devotional practices (Mathews 2006).

Sixth- to seventh-century developments of Christian devotional images in Egypt were linked to developments within the Byzantine realm especially as concerns associations to patterns of worship for the cult of saints as well as, during the turbulent eighth and ninth centuries around phases of state-sponsored iconoclasm, the development of a theory of icons. Much of an icon's effectiveness came to depend upon a transparency of the sacred image providing immediate devotional access to the holy person, who was made recognizable by likeness to known features, attributes, or even inscriptions. The survival of a series of icons dating from perhaps as early as the sixth century until the present day at the Monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai may have been possible because the

monastery was not subject to imperial iconoclastic decrees and because the monastery has remained in use until today.

## 10 Manuscripts

Although pottery sherds were used as a kind of scrap paper, and wax tablets as notebooks, by far the most significant writing surfaces for Late Antique artistic remains are papyrus and parchment. Similar to manuscripts of papyrus, cut pieces of parchment were sewn together into scrolls before the innovation in the Roman Period of the codex form of the book. For codices, pieces of parchment or papyrus could be folded into folios (one sheet folded so as to make two or four pages) and then sewn together as quires (a gathering of folios or leaves) before they were bound together. There is a particular manner of bookbinding associated with Coptic codices in which folios or quires are sewn through their folds and linked to each other by a line of chain stitching. Codicology is particularly concerned with the book as physical object, its written and ornamental features, how it was constructed or might be reconstructed from rearranged quires, or a given page reconstructed from fragments. The codex form of the book came to predominate over the scroll in the fourth century, although scrolls continued to be used for some ceremonial documents and to be represented as the appropriately ancient form of book held by historical figures.

Although in the strictest sense “illuminated” refers to manuscripts with lustrous metallic, typically gold, decorations, illumination is also used in a more general sense to refer to any kind of painting on a manuscript, whether marginal ornamentation, decorated initial letters, or larger compositions. Manuscript paintings are also called miniatures to distinguish between the small scale of painting in books and painting in other formats, mainly that of wall painting, referred to as monumental. The *Glazier Codex* (Pierpont Morgan Library, G67), still preserved in its original covers of wooden boards, presents an early example of a full-page miniature (Bober 1967). At the end of the text of the first fifteen books of the *Acts of the Apostles* is a composition in yellow, red, and brown of an *ankh* version of the cross (*crux ansata*) ornamented with interlaced motifs and peacocks (symbols of resurrection). This manuscript is dated to the turn of the fifth century by the particular uncial forms of the letters. Of course, not all codices were heavily painted. A well-executed drawing on parchment depicts an unusual portrayal of Job as a royal figure – wearing a crown – with his daughters, wearing jewels and diadems (folio 4 verso; Spatharakis 1976: 14–20). This composition is unusual among contemporary representations for emphasizing Job’s eventual success rather than his suffering. This is one of the surviving eight folios of a seventh-century (?) manuscript preserving the text from Job 40:8 to Proverbs 3:19 (Naples, Biblioteca Vittorio Emanuele III, MS 1 B 18) written in Coptic uncials.

The flat, unrolled page of the codex may have allowed for thicker applications of paint, and the facing pages (the back, verso, facing the front, recto, of the following page) encouraged relations across pages and throughout the book (Weitzmann 1977). The expressive purposes of manuscript illumination range from diagrammatic (e.g., rendering key features for identification of a medicinal plant in a herbal),

to narrative and representational (the charioteers of the Charioteer Papyrus; the Job composition), to symbolic (the *ankh* in the Glazier Codex). These expressive purposes may overlap (as in the narrative and symbolic representations of “holy Theophilus” in the *Alexandrian World Chronicle* and Job in the Naples manuscript).

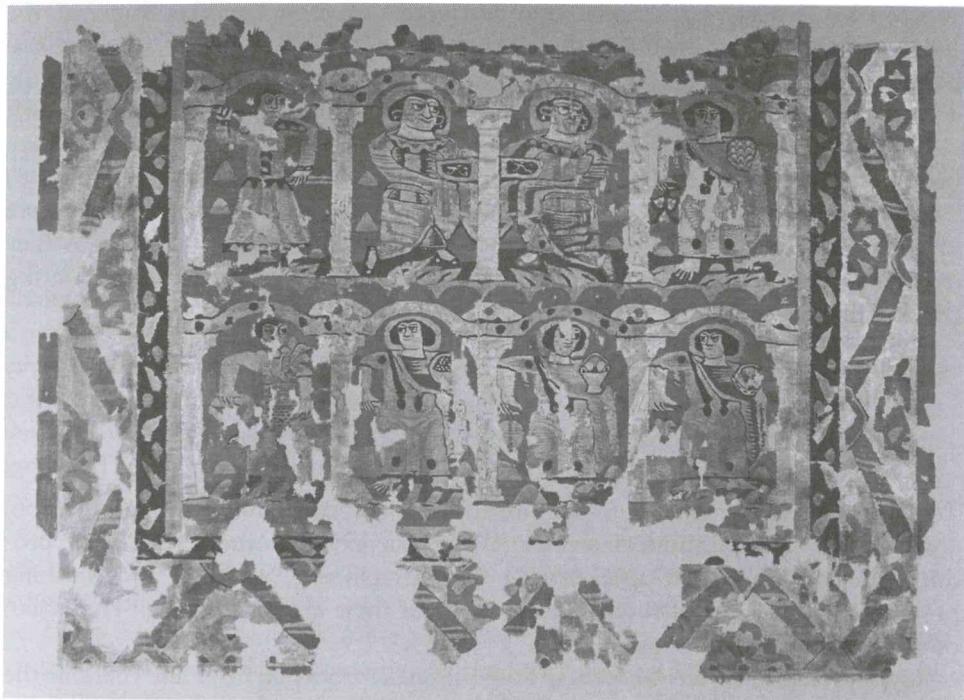
Paintings and drawings for the transmission of designs to artisans may not have been stored in book form. This category of evidence (McKenzie 2007; Stauffer 2008) has only recently attracted scholarly attention, and it is not yet known how they were organized for storage within workshops, whether clients referred to them as they negotiated their commissions, or how artisans might have referred to them during the processes of production.

## 11 Textiles for Clothing and Furnishings

To date, written sources provide most evidence concerning the production, commerce, and acquisition of textiles (Wipszycka 1991). Some textiles were produced in the home, but specialists in dyeing, spinning, weaving, and finishing produced the majority of textile goods. Some of these artisans were self-employed; others worked in workshops.

Egypt preserves by far the richest body of textile evidence from anywhere in the Late Antique world. Great numbers of textiles have long been collected from archaeological sites. However, only recently has their discovery been documented in detail and consistently. Ongoing review of textiles from past excavation and current field-work projects yielding textiles from settlement and funerary contexts reveal much about the use and reuse of textiles over long periods of time in multiple settings (Thomas 2007). Because cloth was labor-intensive to produce and, therefore, fairly expensive but needed for many aspects of everyday life, textiles were reused and resold, handed down or saved for special use. Concomitant with other changes in burial practices during Late Antiquity (the end of mummification and mummy portraits, for example), the dead were dressed in multiple layers of clothing and in the yardage of reused large-scale wall-hangings and purpose-made shrouds. Interestingly, clothes and furnishings reused in burials were often deposited in good condition, perhaps reflecting the wishes of the deceased, survivors honoring the dead, or beliefs about the afterlife (Dunand 2007). Most textiles in museum collections were found in burial contexts.

Vibrancy of coloration, density of ornamentation, and range of motifs and patterns distinguish Late Antique from earlier textiles. Curtains and rugs tend to be ornamented with overall patterns lacking distinct vantage points or orientation. In contrast, wall hangings often organize compositions within architectural frameworks of colonnades (figure 45.12). The most common items of clothing were rectangular shawls and loose-fitting tunics, which could be decorated with inwoven tapestry passages along the neckline and cuffs, in *clavi* (bands extending longitudinally over the shoulders) and segmenta (squares or roundels) placed at the shoulders or near the knees. These basic arrangements were improvised upon as was an ornamental repertory of geometric and interlaced forms and vegetal and animal motifs, in addition to



**Figure 45.12** Wall-hanging representing figures in arcades, tapestry-woven wools. The Brooklyn Museum, 46.128; Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

mythological and Christian motifs. Christians continued to employ mythological imagery on their clothing and furnishings throughout Late Antiquity, sometimes marked as Christian by the addition of the symbol of the cross. Purely Christian compositions were devised as well. These decorations are found in all manner of combinations and color schemes and on versions of the tunic with more close-fitting silhouettes for body and arms. Sometimes tunics were worn as if sleeveless, by pushing arms through slits beneath the sleeves and letting the empty sleeves dangle.

Although often called Coptic, these textiles attest to numerous demographic groups within Egypt and to local and long-distance trade in materials and finished goods. A type of garment known as the Persian Riding Costume is a tight-fitting coat (similar to that worn by the charioteers in the Charioteer Papyrus) with dramatically long sleeves that could be left to drape over the hands or pushed up to bunch along the arm (Fluck and Vogelsang-Eastwood 2004). This type of garment, or one very similar to it, is draped over the shoulders of the forwardmost man approaching Saint Menas. It seems that, as trade textiles traveled, for example, so too did technology, ornamental motifs, aesthetic expectations, and fashions in clothing. Technical developments allowing for more sophisticated weave structures also distinguish Late Antique textiles. Overall patterns repeating small motifs, woven on looms capable of programmable passes of weft threads, first appeared in the third or fourth century.

Over time, the motifs grew larger. Most characteristic from the seventh or eighth century onward are compositions identified by the subjects in their roundels: powerful beasts and mythological creatures, hunters, and mythological and Christian scenes. These are closely related to imported patterned silks of Persia, Central Asia, and China (Brubaker and Haldon 2001). On the streets of Antinoe and in the Alexandrian lecture halls, we should imagine the visual displays created by congregations of literati from around the known world in garments as varied as their origins and as eclectic as their Late Antique cosmopolitan taste.

## 12 Art-historical Study of Late Antique Egyptian Art

Over one hundred years ago, Alois Riegl, an influential scholar of the “Vienna School” so prominent in the early development of art history, explored how Egyptian ornament participated in widespread artistic trends of Late Antiquity. In contrast, the scholarship of Josef Strzygowski, also of the Vienna School, characterized what he understood to be the autochthonous traits of Late Antique Egyptian “folk” art (Elsner 2002; Török 2006b). Studies in line with Stryzgowski’s characterization of Coptic art as unschooled and in opposition to a Hellenism nearly exclusive to Alexandria predominated well into the 1960s. Abetted by a burgeoning market for Coptic art and neglect of confirmatory archaeological context, such views allowed many works “said to have come from Egypt,” modern pastiches composed of textile fragments, recarved sculptures, and outright forgeries to infiltrate the corpus of documented works (Russman 2009). Art historians have since come to pay much closer attention to details of materials and techniques, compositional and iconographic repertoires, and archaeological evidence. Interestingly, the role of Alexandria is again at center stage in studies of widespread trends affecting artistic production, albeit now within the urban matrix of the later Roman Empire extending across Egypt (McKenzie 2007; Kiss 2007). Just as Late Antique art is both universalizing and intensely local through the ways in which Graeco-Roman traditions were adapted in combination with local traditions and those from elsewhere, Egyptian art of Late Antiquity was receptive to multiple historic legacies and to exotic artistic trends, and grounded in an aesthetic that was capacious, adaptive and, ultimately, transformative (Török 2005).

### FURTHER READING

We would recommend the following: *L’Art copte en Égypte* 2000; Capuani 1999; Falk and Lichtwarkiet et al. 1996; Gabra and Eaton-Krauss 2007; Török 2005.