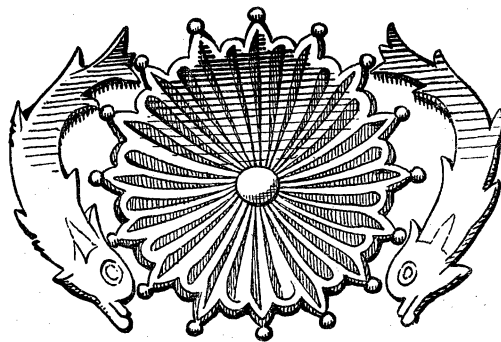


THE XVIIITH CENTURY WALL-PAINTINGS
IN THE CHURCH OF ST. PAUL THE THEBAN
DAIR ANBÂ BÛLÂ

BY
OTTO MEINARDUS

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I. — INTRODUCTION.

The xviiith century Coptic wall-paintings in the subterranean Church of St. Paul the Theban in the Monastery of St. Paul (Dair Anbâ Bûlâ) appear at the end of a long tradition in Christian monastic art. In the history of Coptic monastic art, these wall-paintings are the last attempt to portray the traditional Christian themes, which for centuries have adorned the walls of Coptic churches and monasteries and evoked the ascetic piety of the desert fathers.

In order to appreciate the present renaissance in Coptic art, it is important to visualise the level of artistic degradation and deterioration, to which Coptic art sunk by the xviiith century. Undoubtedly, the day will come when the grotesque wall-paintings in the Church of St. Paul will give way either to new wall-paintings or to a restoration of the xixth century wall-paintings, which are found beneath the xviiith century paintings.

Coptic wall-paintings cannot be easily classified into distinct artistic periods. Every century created its own artistic expression, while, at the same time, it retained the principal themes of the earlier centuries of Christian art. These themes survived into the xviiith century, though the art-expression degenerated to the point of the grotesque.

In the selection of the particular biblical and hagiological themes, which are portrayed on the walls of the Church of St. Paul, we must

see a reflection of Coptic theology and piety, which developed over more than thirteen hundred years. In this context we shall mention only some of the more outstanding Coptic wall-paintings in the churches and monasteries of Egypt, and therefore, the subsequent listing should by no means be considered as a complete catalogue of Coptic wall-paintings. On the contrary, we shall refer to these paintings only in order to demonstrate the geographical extent and the thematic wealth of Coptic mural decorations.

The earliest examples of Christian pictorial representations in Egypt were the wall- and pillar-paintings in the ivth and vth century churches in the Upper Egyptian temples, *e.g.* the churches in the temples of Luxor and Karnak. Falling into the same period, although representing a more popular art-form, are the wall-paintings of the Chapel of the Exodus (ivth century) and the Chapel of Peace (vth-vith century) in the necropolis of al-Bagawat in the Oasis of al-Khargeh. Whereas the wall-paintings in the Chapel of the Exodus portray almost exclusively Old Testament themes, *e.g.* the Exodus, the Ark of Noah, Daniel in the Lion's Den, the Three Holy Youths in the Furnace, scenes from the life of Jonah, Rebecca and Job, etc., the wall-paintings in the Chapel of Peace represent such typical Egyptian subjects as SS. Paul and Thecla and the three women Irene, Dikaiosyne and Euche⁽¹⁾. Quite different from the rather archaic and primitive paintings of the necropolis are the famous polychromes of Bawît (vth-vith century) and Saqqara (vith century). Most of these paintings are apse decorations representing either the Virgin Mother and Child (Elëusa and Galactotrophusa), the Pantocrator with the Virgin Mother and the Twelve Apostles or the original

⁽¹⁾ FAKHRY, Ahmed, *The Necropolis of el-Bagawat in Kharga Oasis*. Cairo, 1955. STERN, H., « Les Peintures du Mausolée 'de l'Exode' à El Bagawat », *Cahiers Archéologiques* XI, 1960, pp. 93 ff. LEIBOVITCH, J., « Hellénismes et hebraïsmes dans une chapelle chrétienne à al-Bagaouât », *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte*, V, 1939, pp. 61-68. WILKINSON, C. K., « Early Christian Paintings in the Oasis of Khargah », *Bull. of the Metropol. Mus. of Art*, New York, 1928, II, pp. 29-36. HAUSER, W., « The Christian Necropolis in the Khargah Oasis », *Bull. of the Metropol. Mus. of Art*, New York, 1932, II, pp. 38-50.

form of this latter theme, the Ascension of Christ⁽¹⁾. To this period belongs also the wall-painting of the « Anchorites and Abbots » of the Monastery of St. Jeremiah, Saqqara, which portray two of the Saints in the orans position and the other two Saints holding the Gospel in their left hand, and blessing with their right hand⁽²⁾. A completely different type of wall-painting was discovered in the Wādī Sarga, south of Asyût. It is a painting of the Three Holy Youths in the Furnace with the Angel of God, and of all the Coptic wall-paintings of this period, this particular painting comes closest to the spirit of the Graeco-Roman period⁽³⁾.

Throughout the Christian Orient the vith century was a very prolific period with regards to mural decorations, and this pertains also to Egypt. A large number of the wall-paintings in the tomb-chapels and churches in Upper Egypt ought to be assigned to this century, *e.g.* the recently discovered wall-paintings in the hermitages and chapels in the desert west of Esna⁽⁴⁾, the wall-paintings of such biblical themes as the Massacre of the Holy Innocents, the First Miracle at Cana and the Resurrection of Lazarus in the Cave-church of St. John the Short east of Dair Abû Hinnis⁽⁵⁾, the wall-paintings of the ruined Church of the Holy Virgin at Shaikh Abada, etc. In spite of the difficulties caused by the Arab Conquest, the Copts maintained and even developed their artistic forms and expressions, and such wall-paintings as we find in the Monastery of St. Simeon at Aswân⁽⁶⁾, and some of the wall-paintings

⁽¹⁾ CLÉDAT, J., *Le Monastère et la Nécropole de Baouît*. Cairo, 1904-1906, 1909, 1916. BOREUX, Ch., « Salle de Baouît », Musée du Louvre, Antiquités égyptiennes, Catalogue-Guide 1, Paris, 1932, pp. 250 ff. WESSEL, Klaus, *Koptische Kunst. Die Spätantike in Ägypten*. Recklinghausen, 1963, pp. 172 ff.

⁽²⁾ QUIBELL, J.E., *Excavations at Saqqara*. 3 vols. Cairo, 1908-1912.

⁽³⁾ DALTON, O.M., « A Coptic Wall Painting from Wadi Sarga », *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, III, 1916, pp. 35 ff.

⁽⁴⁾ SAUNERON, S., « Découvertes dans le désert d'Esna », *Archéologie*, 1967, pp. 1-3.

⁽⁵⁾ CLÉDAT, J., « Notes archéologiques et philologiques », *Bull. Inst. Franç. d'Arch.* II, pp. 41-70.

⁽⁶⁾ MONNERET DE VILLARD, U., *Description Générale du Monastère de St. Siméon de Aswân*. Milan, 1927.

in the Monastery of the Holy Martyrs at Esna should be placed within the viith and viiith century ⁽¹⁾.

For the following two centuries, we have little or no evidence of Coptic mural decorations, and the well-known painting of the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Dormition of the Holy Virgin and the Ascension in the Church of the Holy Virgin in the Dair as-Surîân, which should be assigned to this period, were the work of Syrian artists ⁽²⁾. On the other hand, from the xith to the xiith century we possess a good deal of evidence of a renaissance in Coptic art as seen by the xith century wall-paintings in the Monastery of St. Matthew the Potter (Dair al-Fakhurî) ⁽³⁾ or the famous xiith century wall-paintings in the Church of St. Antony in the Dair Anbâ Antûnûs ⁽⁴⁾. Also the original wall-paintings in the Church of St. Paul in Dair Anbâ Bûla ought to be assigned to this period. Unfortunately, only very few traces of these paintings can be detected (Pl. XI, A; XIII, B), though it should be possible to restore at least some of the paintings on the west-wall of the nave.

After the xiith century we notice a general decline in Coptic art, and the xvith century wall-paintings of the monks, hermits and warrior-saints in the churches of St. Michael, SS. Antony, Paul and Pachomius, and the Hermits in the qasr of the Monastery of St. Macarius are the work of a certain Tekla, an Ethiopian artist ⁽⁵⁾.

In view of this development of Coptic mural paintings, the xviiith century wall-paintings in the Church of St. Paul are quite unique, and although we cannot attribute artistic quality to these paintings, they remain, nevertheless, as evidence of a living tradition of Coptic art, which survived to this dark period of the life of the Coptic Church.

⁽¹⁾ MEINARDUS, O., *Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern*. Cairo, 1965, p. 325.

⁽²⁾ EVELYN WHITE, H.G., *The Monasteries of the Wâdi 'n-Naṭrûn*. Vol. III, New York, 1933.

⁽³⁾ MEINARDUS, O., *op. cit.*, p. 323.

⁽⁴⁾ PIANKOFF, Alexandre, « Peintures au Monastère de Saint Antoine », *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte*, XIV, 1958, pp. 151-163.

⁽⁵⁾ EVELYN WHITE, H.G., *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 70.

II. — THE TESTIMONY OF THE TRAVELLERS.

In the xvth century, the Monastery of St. Paul appears to have undergone a second devastation⁽¹⁾, which obliterated those parts of the monastery which were rebuilt under the auspices of Gabriel VII, the XCVth Patriarch of Alexandria (1525-1568)⁽²⁾. In the beginning of the xvth century, John XVI, the CIIIrd Patriarch of Alexandria (1676-1718), at one time a monk in the Monastery of St. Antony, began the reconstruction of the monastery⁽³⁾, in the course of which a monk of the Monastery of St. Paul was entrusted with the mural decorations in the Church of St. Paul. We are very fortunate in possessing the account of a visitor, who met this monk, after he had completed his wall-paintings.

On May 30th, 1716, Frs. Claude Sicard and J.S. Assemani, coming from the Monastery of St. Antony, arrived at the Monastery of St. Paul in search of Coptic manuscripts. They were hoisted up by a pulley, which took them inside the monastery. The monks conducted them in procession to the church, where they recited some prayers, and on the following day, which was Whitsunday, the two Latin priests witnessed the Pentecostal celebrations of the monks in the Church of St. Paul. In the course of their visit they met the Coptic monk, who painted the walls of the subterranean church. «The walls from the vault to the ground are covered by a very rude painting representing some stories from the Holy Scriptures. They did not forget to paint the two tigers⁽⁴⁾, which dug the grave in which St. Antony placed the body of his father in Jesus

⁽¹⁾ The first devastation of the Monastery of St. Paul occurred in the latter part of the xvth century.

⁽²⁾ The Monastery of St. Paul was rebuilt with the help of ten monks of the Monastery of the Syrians in the Wādī 'n-Naṭrūn, cf. Monks of Dair as-Suriān, *Strat al-Anbā Yūhannis Kame, tarikh Dair as-Suriān*. Wādī 'n-Naṭrūn, 1951, p. 53.

⁽³⁾ FEDDEN, Henry R., «A Study of the Monastery of St. Anthony in the Eastern Desert», *University of Egypt, Faculty of Arts Bulletin*, V, 1937, p. 43.

⁽⁴⁾ From the xvth century onwards, the Monastery of St. Paul was also known as the Dair an-Numur, the Monastery of the Tiger, cf. WÜSTENFELD, F., *Maqrizi's Geschichte der Copten*. Göttingen, 1845, pp. 87-88.

Christ. The monk, who executed this painting, informed us that he had never learned to paint. His work was evident proof of this. We asked him from where he had obtained his different colours, and he told us that he had extracted them from the coloured soils in the neighbouring hills»⁽¹⁾. The wall-paintings, therefore, were executed before 1716 and after 1701, the date of the beginning of the reconstruction of the monastery by John XVI.

On April 11th, 1730, Granger, also coming from the Monastery of St. Antony, arrived at the Monastery of St. Paul. In his account, he mentioned the path, which connects the two Red Sea monasteries, by the use of which one could reach the Monastery of St. Paul in a matter of eight hours. Because of the wilderness around the monastery, the Copts referred to it as the « Monastery of the Tigers». In his description of the Church of St. Paul, Granger informs us that « the grotto in which St. Paul performed penitence constitutes part of the church. It is thirty-two feet long and fourteen feet wide. It is well lighted, and the walls appear to have been repaired recently. There are painted on them somewhat rudely some sacred stories, and that of the tigers has not been forgotten»⁽²⁾. This report is interesting in so far as Granger speaks about a « well lighted church». Unless he referred to the many candles and sanctuary lamps, which could have provided him with this light, the report must remain rather questionable. Both Sicard and Granger mention the wall-painting of the tigers. With all probability, these are the tigers, which are seen on the north-wall of the nave on either side of St. Paul the Theban.

In 1850, the Russian archimandrite Porphyrius Uspensky accompanied by Qummus Dâûd, the future Patriarch Cyril IV (1854-1861), visited the Monastery of St. Paul. After having described his visit to the xviii century Church of St. Michael, Uspensky writes : « In the north corner of the monastery is a small church dedicated to the four and twenty

⁽¹⁾ SICARD, C., Letter of Fr. Claude Sicard to Fr. Fleuriau in *Lettres Édifiantes et Curieuses*. Lyon, 1819, vol. III, pp. 300-301.

⁽²⁾ GRANGER, *Relation du Voyage fait en Égypte en l'année 1730*. Paris, 1745, p. 118.

elders of the Apocalypse⁽¹⁾. The church is entered from a parvis, to which one descends by a long flight of steps. This part of the church is surmounted by a cupola with Coptic and Arabic inscriptions and with representations of Saints. I have copied the whole of this Coptic inscription but none of the Copts understood its meaning. Above this inscription, on a red background, are the names of the Martyrs in Arabic, the Martyrs themselves are painted very badly. They are all on horseback. Higher up in the cupola is another half-obliterated Coptic inscription. The parvis is a few steps higher than the church itself. When one gets down and passes beyond the lattice screen, it is hardly possible by the light of the candles to see the arrangement of the church. It is long, narrow and rather high. In the sanctuary, separated from the church by a stone iconostasis on which are seen faded representations of Saints, behind the consecration table, high up on the wall, is a full-size representation of the Saviour ... Close to the altar is a dark chapel in the name of St. Antony, its altar is surmounted by a very narrow funnel-shaped cupola, while the part before the altar along the chapel is separated from the church by a low wooden screen. Next to this part of the church, and separated from it by a similar screen, is the natural cave in which St. Paul worked out his salvation ... The paintings on the walls of the Apocalyptic Church are bad, the faces are ugly and even terrible»⁽²⁾. Similar to the reports by the xviiith century travellers, Uspensky's observations add little to our understanding of the wall-paintings. True, he referred to a «full-length representation of St. Paul wearing a brown chiton, his arms are lifted up, a raven brings him a little round loaf while two lions lick his feet», which he saw on the left side of the tomb, *i.e.* the eastern wall, but otherwise he did not offer any detailed descriptions of the paintings.

⁽¹⁾ The church is dedicated to St. Paul the Theban. The northern haikal in this church is dedicated to the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse.

⁽²⁾ USPENSKY, P., *Puteshestvie po Egiptu i v monastyri Sviatago Antonia Velikago i Prepadobnago Pavlo Fivayskago v 1850 godu*. St. Petersburg, 1856, p. 207, in PIANKOFF, Alexander, «Two Descriptions by Russian Travellers to the Monasteries of St. Anthony and St. Paul in the Eastern Desert», *Bulletin de la Société Royale de Géographie d'Egypte*, XXI, 1943, pp. 65-66.

In 1877, when Dr. Georg Schweinfurth visited the Monastery of St. Paul, it was inhabited by twenty-eight monks. According to his estimate, the « ancient church with the tomb of St. Paul was restored two hundred years ago, especially if one judges according to the extremely rough and barbaric wall-paintings, which are provided with Coptic and Arabic texts of the Holy Scriptures in the dome of the entrance. Every wall of this very ancient holy place is covered with grotesque caricatures. The heads of the Saints and of the Apostles as well as their halos are designed with the aid of a circle, and the eyes, the nose and the mouth are added with geometrical regularity. Also here ⁽¹⁾, equestrian Saints constitute the principal object of representation. Beneath the present, already darkened plaster, one can discover the old plaster with the ancient ornamentation». Dr. Schweinfurth suggested that it would be worth the trouble to recover the ancient paintings with the help of modern means of restoration ⁽²⁾.

Six years later, in 1883, Fr. Michel Jullien, S.J., visited the Monastery of St. Paul. Familiar with the account by Fr. C. Sicard, S.J., Fr. Jullien merely says : « The walls and the vaults of the chapel are covered with rude paintings representing the life of the Saint and some features of the Holy Scriptures. These paintings are the work of a monk of the monastery. He did not use other colours than the coloured soils of the mountain » ⁽³⁾.

III. — DESCRIPTION OF THE WALL-PAINTINGS IN THE CHURCH OF ST. PAUL.

GENERAL REMARKS

The monk, who was entrusted with the mural decorations of the Church of St. Paul, was undoubtedly acquainted with a wide variety

⁽¹⁾ As in the case of the wall-paintings of the Church of St. Antony in the Monastery of St. Antony.

⁽²⁾ SCHWEINFURTH, G., *Auf Unbetretenen Wegen in Ägypten*. Hamburg, 1922, p. 198.

⁽³⁾ JULLIEN, Michel, *Voyage dans le Désert de la Basse-Thébaïde aux couvents de St. Antoine et de St. Paul*. Lyon, 1884, p. 61.

of traditional Coptic themes, ranging from the popular warrior-saints to the desert fathers of the ivth and vth century and such biblical themes as the the Four Evangelists, the Three Holy Youths in the Furnace or the apocalyptic figures in the Chapel of the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse. With regard to his technique, he used black paint to outline the features of his subjects. For the sake of variety, he employed dark and bright colours alternately, *e.g.* in the chain mails and the halos of the equestrian Saints. Otherwise, the faces and the general posture of the figures betray almost identical features, which means, that the monk was either unaware or unable to portray the hagiological characteristics of his subjects. Wherever possible, he employed a large and rough circle for the heads and the halos of his subjects. In every instance, the centre of the circle is clearly marked by the impression of the circle needle. At the same time, the painter concentrated on some paintings more than on others, which is noticeable by comparing the more elaborate paintings of the Equestrian Saints in the dome of the entrance to the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse. As he stated himself, the painter was inexperienced and without any formal training⁽¹⁾. At the time of the execution of the paintings, the colouring was undoubtedly rather hard and glaring. Fortunately, the original hardness has passed off, and nowadays, the colouring has a somewhat mellow effect.

We shall describe the paintings in the following order : (1) The six Equestrian Saints in the dome built over the entrance to the subterranean Church of St. Paul. (2) The two Equestrian Saint son the north-wall of the entrance to the Church of St. Paul. (3) The Founders of Monasticism on the north-wall of the nave. (4) The Four Evangelists and two unidentified female Saints. (5) The Chapel of the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse. (6) The three Archangels and the Three Holy Youths in the Furnace with St. Michael on the west-wall of the nave. (7) The Holy Virgin and Child with the Cherubim on the upper south-wall of the nave. (8) The Saints and Monks on the walls of the nave.

⁽¹⁾ SICARD, C., *loc. cit.*

1. *The Six Equestrian Saints.*

The dome above the entrance to the Church of St. Paul is adorned with a geometrical design of six interlacing stars and six equestrian Saints, whom the monks used to identify as SS. George, Victor, Theodore Stratelates, Claudius, Theodore the Oriental, and Shalabi ⁽¹⁾. The Coptic text, which appears between the geometrical design and the Equestrian Saints can only be partially deciphered. The text gives the names of the six Saints: St. James the Sawn-Asunder, an unidentified Saint, St. Julianus or Julius of Aqfahs, St. Cyriacus (?), an unidentified Saint, and St. Iskhirun of Qallfn. The nimbus of three saints is black on a light background, the nimbus of the other three saints is light on a dark background. The horses of the six Saints ride towards the right, while the six riders are turned to the front. St. James the Sawn-Asunder (27 Hâtûr), who is riding on a brown horse, is dressed in a scaly chain-mail (PL. II, A). His right arm is bent, and in his hand he holds the reins. An oblong shaped crown (?) is set on top of his halo. To the right of St. James the Sawn-Asunder, there is an unidentified Saint on a brown horse. In his right hand, which is raised, he holds the reins. The upper part of his chain-mail is decorated with nine crosses, the lower part of his chain-mail with nine diamonds. On his head, he wears a crown. Beneath his horse, there is a dragon-like monster. To the right of this unidentified Saint, there is St. Julius of Aqfahs (22 Tût), who is said to have suffered martyrdom during the Diocletian persecution. Riding on a brown horse, the Saint has his right hand raised, holding in his hand a spear surmounted by a cross (PL. II, B). With this spear he pierces the devil, who is portrayed beneath his horse. The upper part of the chain-mail of St. Julius shows four crosses, the lower part is made of scales. To the right of St. Julius, there is St. Cyriacus (?) ⁽²⁾ riding on a brown horse. The Saint wears an oblong shaped crown.

⁽¹⁾ MEINARDUS, O., *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts*. Cairo, 1961, pp. 111-112.

⁽²⁾ The Coptic Church commemorates two saints with the name of Cyriacus. Cyriacus of Corinth (3 Hâtûr) was a disciple of St. Euthymius and lived as a hermit in Palestine. Cyriacus, the son of Julietta (15 Abib) was an infant martyr.

In his right hand, which is raised, he holds the reins. The upper part of his chain-mail has a star-like design, the lower part shows fifteen light dots. Between St. Cyriacus (?) and the Saint to the right, there is a small figure with four legs (?) and two hands. The unidentified Saint to the right (St. George?) rides on a white horse. In his right hand, which is raised, he holds the reins. The upper part of his chain-mail has the tau-cross design, the lower part is made of scales. Between the hind legs of his horse there is a dog (?) with a pronounced nose and a long tail. The Saint to the right is St. Iskhirun of Qallîn (7 BÂU'ÂNah), one of the soldiers of Arianus, who went to Asyût to confess his faith. After St. Iskhirun had been subjected to many tortures, a magician was brought to give him a draught of poison. St. Iskhirun drank from it without showing any ill effects. The person to the right of St. Iskhirun holds in his left hand a spear and in his right hand the reins of a camel. He may be the magician. St. Iskhirun wears a crown. His chain-mail is made of scales. His right arm is raised holding in his hand the reins. Between the front and hind legs of his horse there are two camels.

The Coptic text below the Equestrian Saints states that the wall-paintings were executed during the patriarchate of John, the CIIIrd in the number of the fathers, the patriarchs.

2. *The Two Equestrian Saints.*

On the north-wall of the entrance, *i.e.* on the wall facing the steps, there are paintings of two large Equestrian Saints riding on a white horse towards the right. The Saint on the left (west), St. Theodore (Pl. III, A), holds a spear with both hands. Since the lower portion of the painting is damaged, it is impossible to identify the object which he spears. The Saint on the right (east) holds his spear surmounted by a cross with his right hand (Pl. III, B). Both horses are covered with richly ornamented saddle-cloths. These two Equestrian Saints are inferior copies of the wall-paintings of the Equestrian Saints on the north and west wall of the narthex of the Church of St. Antony in the Dair Anbâ Antûnîûs (Pl. IV, A, B) ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Cf. PIANKOFF, A., «Peintures au Monastère de S. Antoine», *BSAC*, XIV, 1958, pp. 151-163.

3. *The Founders of Monasticism.*

The north-wall of the nave is adorned with a sadly damaged wall-painting representing three desert fathers. They are from the left to the right : SS. Macarius, Antony and Paul the Theban. St. Macarius, who is wearing the omophorion or ballîn, is holding in his right hand the pectoral cross or şalıb şadr, and in his left hand the walking-staff or şasâ. In the centre, there is St. Antony (damaged), and on the right of him, there is St. Paul the Theban with his right hand raised and dressed in the hairshirt. At the feet of St. Paul, there are two lions on either side of him. Between St. Antony and St. Paul, there is a raven holding in its beak the Eucharistic Loaf or qurbân. (Pl. V, A)

4. *The Four Evangelists and two unidentified female Saints.*

The upper four corners of the nave of the Church of the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse are adorned with paintings of the four Evangelists. The north-east corner : St. John; the north-west corner : St. Luke; the south-east corner : St. Mark; the south-west corner : St. Matthew. The Evangelists are clothed in the sticharion or tûniyah, and across their breasts they wear the orarion, which is decorated with crosses⁽¹⁾. On either side of each of the Evangelists there are encircled crosses (Pl. VI, A, B).

On the upper north-wall of the nave of the Church of the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse there is an unfinished wall-painting. In the centre, there is a female figure (the Holy Virgin?), her hands in the orans position. A dark frame encloses the central figure. On the left of her (east), there is another female figure with a halo and with her hands in the orans position. On her left shoulder, we notice a white cross. To the right of the figure in the centre, there is no painting (Pl. X, B).

⁽¹⁾ The orarion is worn by deacons and subdeacons. In the case of the latter, it is passed across the breast, under the arms, crossed on the back, drawn over the shoulders and the ends passed through the band in front. Cf. BURMESTER, O.H.E., KHS-, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church. A Detailed Description of her Liturgical Services, etc.* Cairo, 1967, p. 30.

5. *The Chapel of the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse.*

The Chapel of the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse constitutes the northern section of the Church of St. Paul the Theban. The interior of the chapel is completely dark. The dome of the chapel is adorned with the paintings of the Seven Spirits of God of the Apocalypse⁽¹⁾. They are represented in the form of ministering angels, who are clothed in a sticharion with the orarion crossed over their breasts and wound around their waists. On their heads they wear coronets surmounted by a cross. A flaming jet proceeding out of their mouths is supported by their hands, and in their left hands they are holding an orb (PL. VII, B).

The eastern curve of the dome is adorned with a painting representing Jesus Christ as Pantocrator seated on a throne and surrounded by an aureole. In His left hand He holds the Gospel with the letters IHC XC written on it, while His right hand is raised in blessing. An additional wide circle surrounds the aureole, in which the painter has portrayed the symbols of the four Evangelists. To the upper right of Christ, there is the head of a bird, which is supposed to be the eagle representing St. John the Evangelist. The eagle is said to portray the divinity of Christ. To the lower right of Christ, there is the head of an ox representing St. Luke the Evangelist. The ox is said to symbolize the sacrificial or priestly nature of Christ. To the upper left of Christ, there is the head of an angel, representing St. Matthew the Evangelist. The angel is said to portray the spiritual genealogy of Christ. To the lower left of Christ, there is the head of a lion representing St. Mark the Evangelist. The lion is said to symbolize the power of Christ (PL. VII, A).

Below the dome are the wall-paintings of the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse⁽²⁾. On the four walls, there are three Elders each. The

⁽¹⁾ *Apocalypse* IV : 5 ; V : 6.

⁽²⁾ *Apocalypse* IV : 4. For a study of the significance of the Twenty-four Elders in Coptic theology, cf. PROCLUS, *De xxiv senioribus apocalypticis*. Ed. Gasalee, *Parerga Coptica* I, pp. 20 ff. For parallels of Coptic wall-paintings of the Twenty-four Elders, cf. the walls of the central sanctuary of the Church of the Holy Virgin and of Lord George in the Hârat ar-Rûm, Cairo ; the apse of the southern sanctuary of St. Takla Haymanot in the Church of as-Saydah al-Mu'allaqah in Old Cairo ;

walls of the four corners, which protrude slightly, are also adorned with three Elders each, one in each corner and flanked on either side by an Elder. Each figure is identified by his name, which in each case is written above the Elder. The Twenty-four Elders are identically portrayed. They wear a coronet, and each of them is seated on a highbacked, jewelled throne holding a chalice-like vial (censer) in his hand. Above the halo, there is a white triangle with a geometrical design including a cross and six dots. The names of some of the Elders are legible. They follow the letters of the Greek alphabet with the suffix « el ». These names are considered to be of magic power, and they were duly celebrated in hymns ⁽¹⁾. The following names could be read : Akhaël, Banouël, Ganouël, Daoël, Eoël, Zaoël, Eaoël, Thaoël, Ioël, Kaoël, Laoël, Maoël, Naoël, Xiphiël, (damaged), (damaged), (damaged), Zaoël, Tadiël, Ymniël, Phylaël, Chraoël, (damaged), (damaged) (Pl. VIII, A, B).

6. *The Three Archangels and the Three Holy Youths in the Furnace with St. Michael.*

The west-wall of the nave of the Church of St. Paul the Theban is adorned with a large painting portraying seven persons, three archangels, St. Michael and the Three Holy Youths in the Furnace. The three archangels on the southern part of the west-wall appear identical ⁽²⁾.

the Church of St. George, Gizeh, Cairo, the Church of the Holy Virgin, Rod al-Farağ, Cairo; and the north, south and east walls in the Chapel of Benjamin in the Church of St. Macarius in the Dair Abû Maqâr, Wâdî 'n-Naṭrân.

⁽¹⁾ A fragment recovered by Hugh Evelyn White in the Monastery of St. Macarius begins : « O what shall tell the glory and the honour of the Twenty-four Elders, they who wear robes of light and have crosses of glory upon their heads? Four and twenty vials are in their hands, filled with sweet odours ». EVELYN WHITE, H.G., *The Monasteries of the Wâdî 'n-Naṭrân*. New York, 1933, vol. III, p. 95.

⁽²⁾ There are no names attached to the three archangels. Polotsky gives the names of the seven archangels as SS. Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Suriel, Raguel, Asuel, Saraphuel. POLOTSKY, H.J., « Suriel der Trompeter », *Le Muséon*, XLIX, 1936, p. 236. The Psalmodia lists the following names : Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Suriel, Zedekiel, Sarathiel, Ananiel. Cf. MÜLLER, C.D.G., *Die Engellehre der Koptischen Kirche*, Wiesbaden, 1959.

In their right hands, which are raised, they carry a staff surmounted by a cross. In their left hands, they are holding an orb. The archangels are clothed in a sticharion with an orarion or zunnâr crossed over their breasts and wound around their waists. On their heads they wear a coronet, their halos are dark.

The Three Holy Youths in the Furnace, Ananias, Misael and Azarias, are portrayed with their hands in the orans position, though their hands are not raised. Their feet are turned towards the left, facing St. Michael. The Angel of God is identified with St. Michael⁽¹⁾. He is turned slightly towards the right, at least his feet and his right arm point to the right (Pl. IX). The theme of the Three Holy Youths in the Furnace is not uncommon in Coptic wall-paintings, and we find it portrayed on the walls of the vth century Chapel of the Exodus in the necropolis of al-Bagawat, al-Khargeh, the walls of the vith century chapel at Wâdî Sarga, as well as on the walls of the northern sanctuary of the Church of St. Macarius (xith century) in the Dair Abû Maqâr in the Wâdî 'n-Naṭrûn⁽²⁾.

7. *The Holy Virgin and Child with the Cherubim.*

On the south-wall of the nave, above the entrance to the passage leading to the Church of St. Mercurius (Abû's-Saifain), there is a painting of the Holy Virgin and Child (Hodigitria) with two attending cherubim, each of them is holding an orb in the left hand. In their right hands, the cherubim hold a sceptre. Above the Holy Virgin and Child and the two cherubim there is the following inscription : « The Cherubim praise thee, the men ... » (Pl. X, A).

8. *The Saints and Monks.*

On the east-wall of the nave, between the Sanctuary of the Twenty-four Elders and the Sanctuary of St. Antony, there is a wall-painting of an

⁽¹⁾ Cf. THEODOSIUS, *Encomium of Michael*. Ed. Budge, fol. 26 a in *Michael the Archangel*. MUYSER, Jacob, « Le Culte des Trois Saints Jeunes gens chez les Coptes », *Les Cahiers Coptes*, VI, 1954, pp. 17-31.

⁽²⁾ EVELYN WHITE, H.G., *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 103.

unidentified Saint. On his head he wears a tiara or a Phrygian cap, his eyes are turned to the left. The Saint is clothed with the omophorion, and in his right hand he holds a scroll. His left hand is in the orans position. The monks identify this Saint with St. Athanasius (7 Bašuns) (Pl. V, B).

On the east-wall of the nave, and south of the wooden haikal-screen of the Sanctuary of St. Antony, there is a wall-painting (damaged) representing three Saints. Around the halo of the Saint to the right, *i.e.* within the enclosure of the Tomb of St. Paul the Theban, there is the following Coptic inscription : « Hail our Father Abba Macarius the Great ». The two Saints to the left of St. Macarius are unidentified. The wall-painting of the Saint in the centre is sadly damaged, and since this Saint appears to be beardless, the monks maintain that the figure represents a female Saint. The unidentified Saint on the left has a short beard, and his hands are in the orans position (Pl. XIII, A).

On the northern end of the wall separating the enclosure of the Tomb of St. Paul the Theban from the passage leading to the Church of St. Mercurius there is a wall-painting of the face of a Saint with a long mustache and beard. His halo is decorated with twelve dots. The monks identify this person with St. Moses the Black or the Robber (24 Bâû'ânah) (Pl. XII, A).

On the eastern wall of the passage leading to the Church of St. Mercurius there are two sets of wall-paintings of the faces of several Saints. There, are the three Saints of the Wâdi 'n-Naṭrûn Monastery of al-Baramûs, St. Maximus (right) St. Domitius (centre) (17 Ṭûbah), and their teacher St. Arsenius (left) (13 Bašuns) (Pl. XI, A). The halos of these three Saints are so portrayed that their outer circles interlace ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ In this connection it is interesting to note that the monks of Scetis knew of two Roman princes, Arcadius and Honorius, sons of the Emperor Theodosius, who were taught by St. Arsenius. Could it be possible that some confusion with this story accounts for the royal elements in the tradition of the « Little Strangers » of Dair al-Baramûs? By the xvth century, St. Arsenius is reported to have been the teacher of SS. Maximus and Domitius and not of Arcadius and Honorius. Cf. WÜSTENFELD, F., *Maqrizi's Geschichte der Copten*. Göttingen, 1845, p. 112.

Then there are the faces of the two desert fathers, Apip and Apollo (25 Bâbah), both of whom suffered martyrdom. The face of St. Apip is portrayed somewhat above that of St. Apollo (Pl. XI, B).

On the western wall of the same passage, there is a wall-painting of the faces of SS. Samuel of Qalamûn (8 Kîhak) and Justus, his disciple (10 Tûbah). Above the halos of these two Saints, there is a Coptic inscription, which reads : « Our holy Father . . . our holy Father ». It appears that the face of St. Samuel of Qalamûn has been restored. The face of St. Justus is covered with plaster (Pl. XII, B).

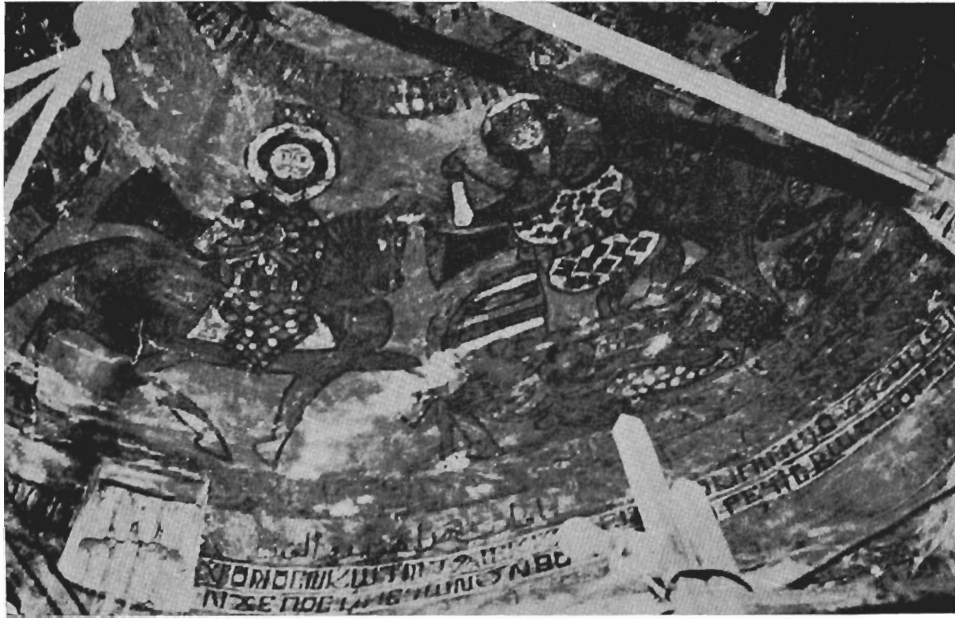
IV. — THE ORIGINAL WALL-PAINTINGS IN THE CHURCH OF ST. PAUL.

The original wall-paintings in the Church of St. Paul have for the most part disappeared. Only some parts of the paintings of three faces have survived the destructions of the monastery in the latter part of the xvth and in the xvith century. These fragments adorn the east and west walls of the passage leading to the Church of St. Mercurius. The artwork ought to be assigned to the same period as the wall-paintings in the Church of St. Antony in the Dair Anbâ Antûniûs, *i.e.* to the first half of the xiiith century. The paintings show a superior artistic quality as seen by the well-designed eyes, eye-brows and noses (Pl. XI, A; XIII, B).

The author recommends that the Society for Coptic Archaeology in cooperation with the administrative authorities of the Monastery of St. Paul the Theban seriously consider the restoration of the original wall-paintings in the Church of St. Paul.



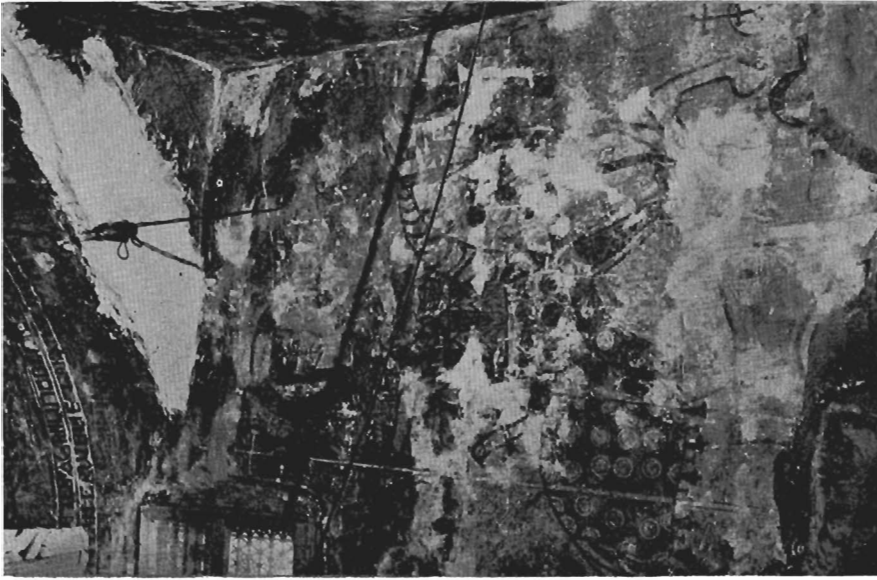
The Monastery of St. Paul (Photo : Jean Doresse).



A. — St. James the Sawn-Asunder (to the right of St. James: an unidentified Saint).



B. — St. Julius of Aqfahs (to the right of St. Julius: St. Cyriacus (?)).



B. — Equestrian Saint.



A. — St. Theodore.



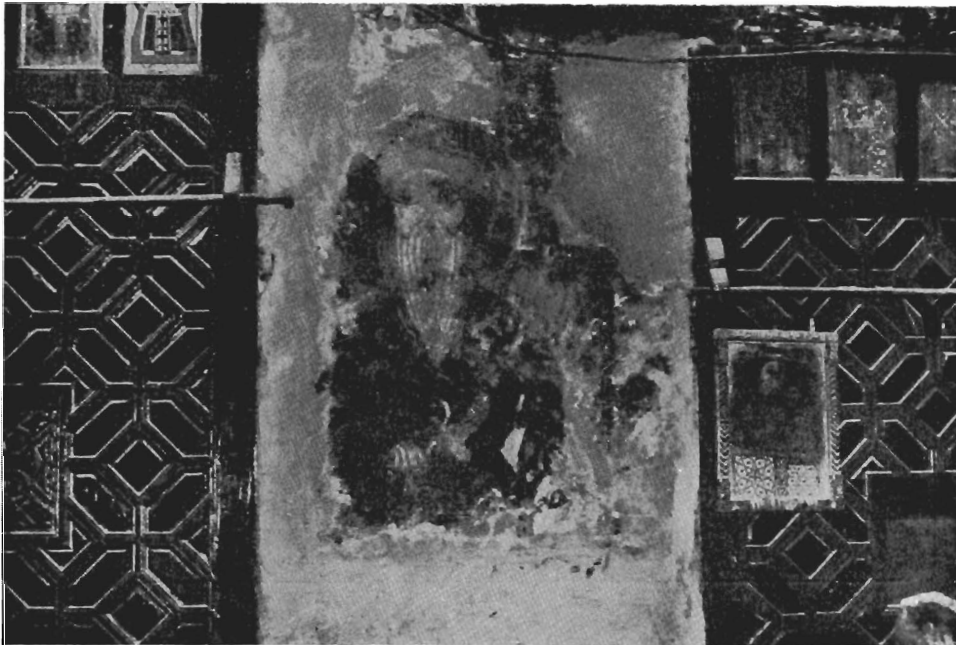
A. — Equestrian Saint.



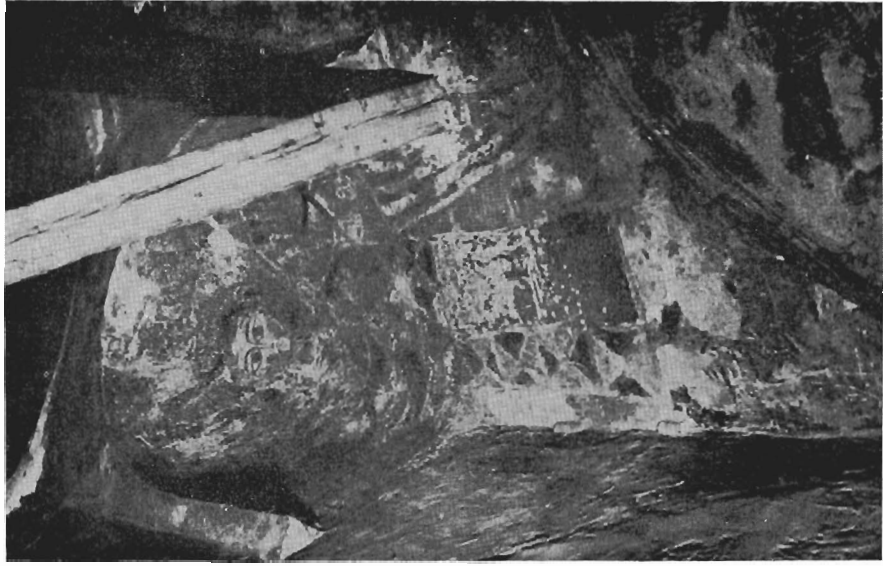
B. — Equestrian Saint.



A. — From the left to the right : SS. Macarius, Antony and Paul the Theban.



B. — Wall-painting of an unidentified Saint.



B. — St. Luke (north-west corner).



A — St. John (north-east corner).



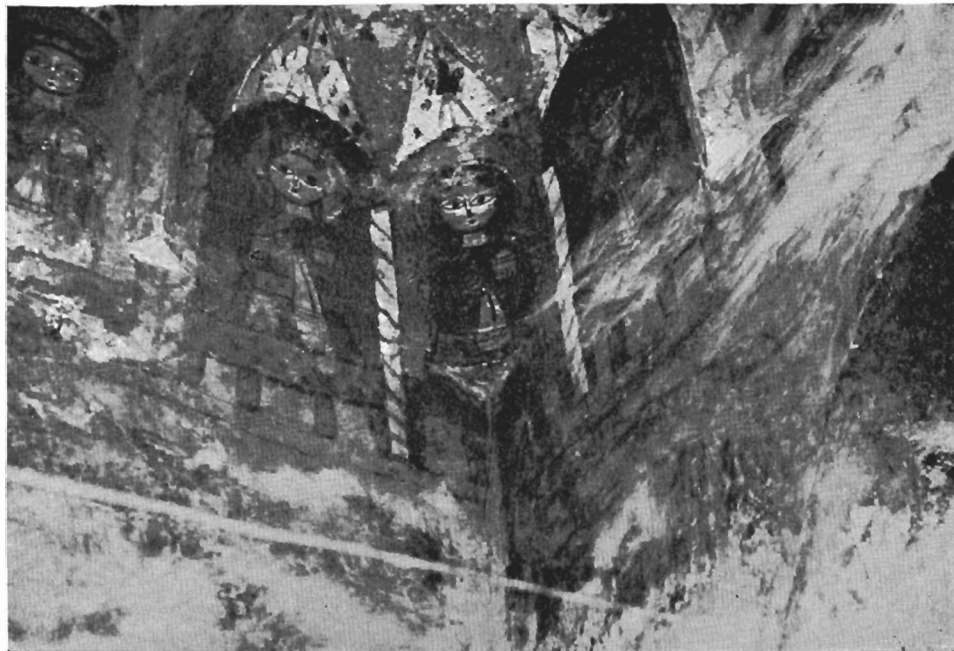
A. — Jesus Christ as Pantocrator.



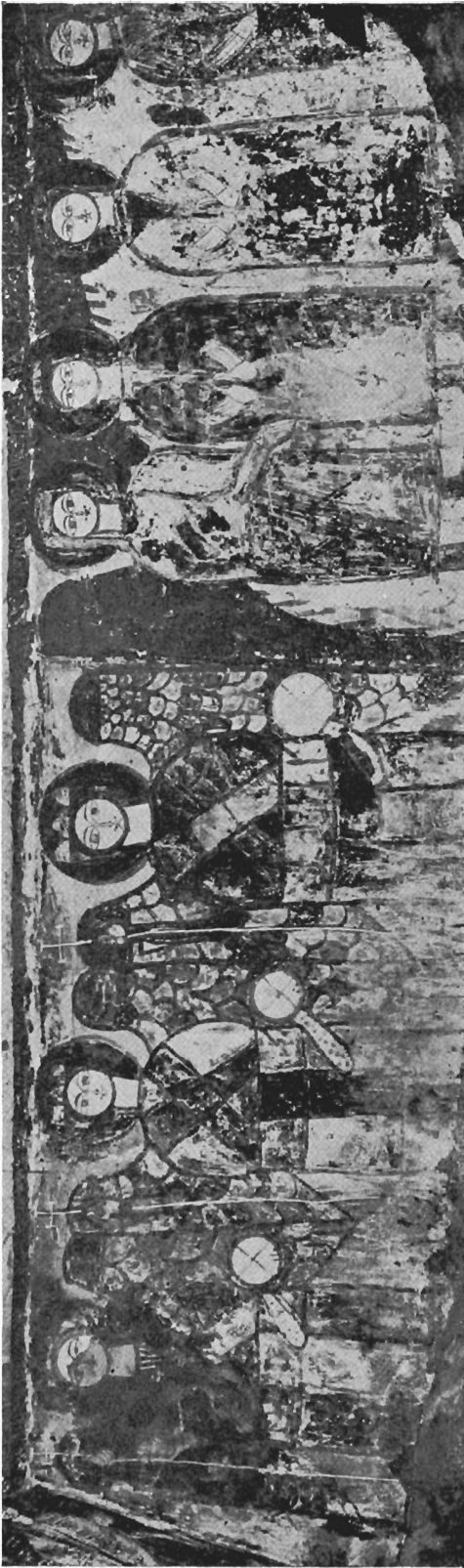
B. — The Seven Spirits of God of the Apocalypse.



A. — Chapel of the 24 Elders of the Apocalypse (north-wall).



B. — Chapel of the 24 Elders of the Apocalypse (north-east corner).



The Three Holy Youths in the Furnace : Ananias, Misael and Azarias.



A. — The Holy Virgin and Child (Hodigitria).



B. — Unfinished wall-painting. In the centre : female figure (Holy Virgin?).



A — St. Maximus (right), St. Domitius (centre), and their teacher St. Arsenius (left).



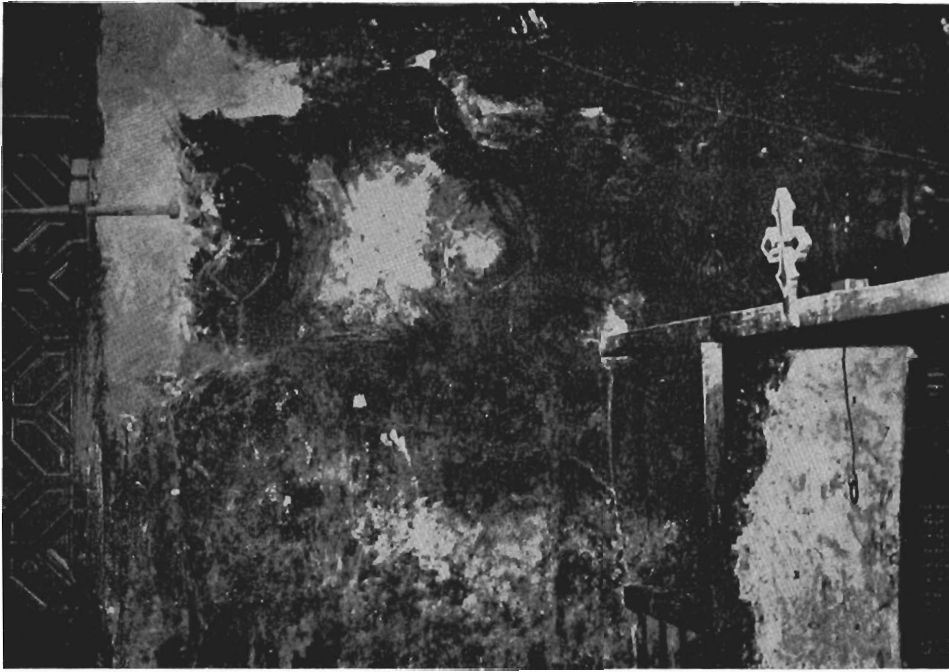
B. — SS. Apip and Apollo.



A. — St. Moses the Black or the Robber.



B. — St. Samuel of Qalamûn and St. Justus, his disciple.



A. — Unidentified Saint.



B. — Few traces of painting.

