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The Church of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. George in EL-Ghanayme, Assiut

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Keywords

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the ancient Church of The Holy Virgin Mary and St. George Church in EL-Ghanayem , which was not published before. It is located in the EL-Ghanayem, Assiut Governorate. Unfortunately, despite all ancientness of this church, it was not mentioned in the ancient books of history. It is noted that the church has a strange outline as it contains 27 domes, which is not common in the construction of churches. Despite it shows one of the rare outlines in the construction of churches, it is similar to other churches of the monasteries of Egypt in its antiquity and the sense of spirituality for the worshiper. It is distinguished by its high and wide wall as well as its simple designed minaret. It is said that they were two adjacent churches. This study records the architectural outline of the church and its horizontal and vertical projections, which is published for the first time in this research.

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The Church of the Holy Virgin Mary¹ and St. George² in El-Ghanayme, Assiut

The Location of the Church:

The church of the Holy Virgin Mary and St. George is located in El-Ghanaïem, which is a district of Assiut governorate; it lies at a distance of about 40 km south –west of Assiut, it is surrounded from Abo-Tig on north, Sedfa on the east, Tema on the south, and the western desert on the west.³

An Overview of the Church:

It is considered one of the important churches in Assiut Governorate. Despite its importance, no information was published on it before. The significance of this church is evident in its outer and internal structures. As for the outer structure, it resembles the desert monasteries in terms of its high walls that reach to approximately 6 meters high. Concerning the internal structure, it also resembles the desert monasteries in the design and domes. It is narrated that there were originally two churches, which

¹ **The Virgin Mary:** she was the mother of Jesus Christ; she died in 48 A.D, and lived for fifteen years after the ascension of Christ to heaven and lived for sixty years. See:

اللجنة المجمعية للطقوس، السنكسار الجامع لأخبار الأنبياء والرسل والشهداء والقديسين، مطبعة اميريال بعبدين، الطبعة الثانية (منقحة ومزودة)، 2013م، ج1، 411 .

² **St. George :** The church calls him the prince of Martyrs, He was born in Cappadocia in Asia minor, in the half of the third Century AD. His father, who was a governor, died when George was twenty years of age. He became a Calvary man on the army, he held high ranks in the army and became a leader. . he refused to cense for the pagan gods, h He defened his Christian faith, he was tortured by various means of torture, hi head was cut off. He is a famous Martyrs, There are various accounts of the history of saint George, known in Arabic as marJirges, respected by the Christian in all over the world, he is honored by the Christian of the east and the west. The Russians paint his image on the castles, the British on their coins, the consider him as an intercessor for them and a protector to their kingdom , there is a Greek church for St. George in old Cairo beside the hanging church and the Coptic museum and there several churches in Egypt carries his name .Saint George is one of the most beloved and revered saints of the Coptic churches. The church celebrates his Martyrdom in The Twenty-Third Day of the of Baramoudah. see :

- The Coptic Encyclopedia, volume 4, 1139.1140.

- على باشا مبارك، الخطط التوفيقية الجديدة لمصر القاهرة ومدنها وبلادها القديمة والشهيرة، الطبعة الثانية، الهيئة المصرية للكتاب، 1990م، ج 14، ص 54

- اللجنة المجمعية للطقوس، السنكسار، ج1، 182.

- اللجنة المجمعية للطقوس، السنكسار، ج2، 149-151.

³ عماد عادل ابراهيم، التجمعات الرهبانية، ص 23.

were united into one, as Somers Clarke listed two churches in this place under No. 7 and 8), the first bears the name of the Virgin (al-Sayyida al-'Azra) and the second is named after St. George (Mar Girgis). During that time, the churches in this area belonged to Abu Tig Diocese⁴

The Outer Entrance to the Church:

The church is accessed through the outer entrance of the church. The main entrance is located on the far west side of the north wall of the church (150 cm wide, 240 cm high), where it overlooks the main street and consists of a single-leaf wooden door that is topped by a semi-circular façade.

The Narthex of the Outer Entrance:

It can be reached through the main external entrance to the church (250 cm wide, 500 cm long). On the sides, one can see the pastor's office and a reception for guests.

The Churchyard:

It is a rectangular atrium (32 m wide x 10.5 m long) with various architectural units and service buildings used by the church. These include an ancient building located to the north of the archaeological church building, designated as a residence for the priest, the patron of the church.

It is well known that the atrium has been used if the worshipers are crowded inside the church, especially on the holy feasts.

⁴سومرز كلارك, الاثار القبطية في وادي النيل, ترجمة ابراهيم سلامة, ص 318

The Minaret:

The minaret ⁽⁵⁾ is located in the far northwest of the church building, (to the north of the passer to the church entrance). It is a high structure, consisting of two floors, interspersed with rectangular openings, each of which ends with a simple semi-circular arch. The minaret is simple in design and devoid of any decorations or inscriptions. The floors are surmounted by a small semi-circular dome surmounted by a huge iron cross. The minaret from the ground surface is (13.45 m high), and its base ranges between 3 square meters wide.

The Side Narthex of the Church:

It is located on the north side along the church, and extends to the middle of the church from the east side. It is an empty space topped by reeds and sometimes used for storage.

The Church Entrances:

There are several entrances to reach the interior of church. They are as follows:

The Main West Entrance:

It is located on the west side of the church (240 cm high, 150 cm wide). It is a modern iron two-shutter gate, adorned with four crosses. The entrance is surmounted by a beautiful cross filigreed in the church wall. This entrance leads to an outer narthex of the church, which has three entrances leading to the church interior

The Internal Entrances to the Church:

The outer narthex has three internal entrances, of which one is located on the east side of the narthex (100 cm wide, 230 cm high) and the other two

⁽⁵⁾ The minaret is the tower on top of the church, surmounted by a cross symbolizing the church. It indicates that the church is the light of the world.

- تادرس يعقوب ملطى, قاموس المصطلحات الكنسية, مطبعة الأخوة المصريين, القاهرة, 1991م, ص 33.

are located in the north and south walls. All lead to the nave and are equal in dimensions (78 cm wide, 170 cm high).

The passer to the east entrance to this narthex can find on its right a marble slab inscribed by the date of the church's renewal.

Based on the renovation text, the church was built in 1556 A.D. under the patronage of the Archpriest Ebaid Dergham.

The inscription reads as follows:

"كنيسة السيدة العذراء ومارى جرجس

بالغنايم

بنعمة الله أسسها وشيدها

القمص عبيد درغام سنة 1556"

"Kanissat al-Sayyida al-'Azra Mariam wa-Mary Girgis bil Ghanayem Beneamatullah Assasaha wa Shayadaha al-Qomos Ebaid Dergham sanat 1556".

It means "The Church of the Virgin and Mary Gerges in Al-Ghanayem, by the grace of God, was founded and built by Father Obaid Dargham in 1556".

The Nave:

This church is unique due to its style that differed from other churches, as it is close in classification to the twelve-domed style, but it includes 27 domes, divided into seven equal main transepts. The courtyard rests on twelve main pillars (120 cm x 108 cm wide, 364 cm in high) interconnected by semi-circular arches. There are also lower corner niches at the beginning of arches. The nave ends on the east side with the choir of deacons, followed by the iconostasis and then the six sanctuaries. The baptistery is located on the south of altars. It is also noted that there

are arched openings in the inner walls of the church. It is worth mentioning that there is a noticeable rise in the ground surface in the far southwest and northwest corner of the church nave, where some of the founding fathers of the church are buried.

The Deacon's Choir:

It is worth mentioning that this place is designated to the choir only in front of both sanctuaries of the Virgin Mary and Saint George, the patron saints of the church. The choir, rises about 46 cm from the church floor as it has three main steps leading to any of them.

The Iconostasis:

It is worth mentioning that the iconostasis is a wall built of bricks, except for the iconostasis that precedes the altar of Martyr George⁶, which is made of wood. As for the iconostasis that precedes the altar of the Angel Michael and Gabriel, they are similar in design, as they are stone carved with crosses, and their entrance is a semi-circle from the top. There are two openings on both sides of the entrance, and on the top of the iconostasis, there is an inscription of a cross.

The Altars and Sanctuaries:

The church has six altars running from south to north as follows: the archangel Gabriel, the Virgin Mary, the archangel Michel, Ibsekheron El-Qeileni, St. George and St. Tekla Hemanut⁷. It is said that the church was

⁶ Raed Nabil Zaher Kamel, Woodwork in Archaeological Coptic Churches and Monasteries of Assiut, An Archaeological, Artistic, and Touristic Study, unpublished Master thesis, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Minia University, ,25 : 26 . 2017

⁷ He was born in Ethiopia in the seventh century AD, and his family was a priestly priest, and his mother was barren and prayed to God to bless her with a child, and then she was blessed with this son. He was righteous and pious, and at the age of fifteen he was ordained by Bishop Cyril the Fifth a deacon, then a priest in the name of Takla Haimanot. He was a hermit, and he kept for nearly fifty years, picking from one place to another, and performing miracles, he endured many troubles from the pagans.

اللجنة الجمعية للطبوس. السنكسار. ج 2, 52 : 521.

originally two churches⁸. Hence, it is noticed that there is a wall between the south and north parts, as the south part includes the baptistery and three sanctuaries, while the north part includes three other sanctuaries.. Also, the south part includes a wall between the baptistery and the sanctuary of the angel Gabriel. In addition, there is an entrance interconnecting them in the middle of the wall.

It is worth mentioning that the sanctuary of the Virgin Mary rises about 40 cm from the two side altars. It has two steps to move between them. As for the three north altars and the choir preceding the sanctuary of Martyr George, they rise from the roof of the church by about 40 cm.

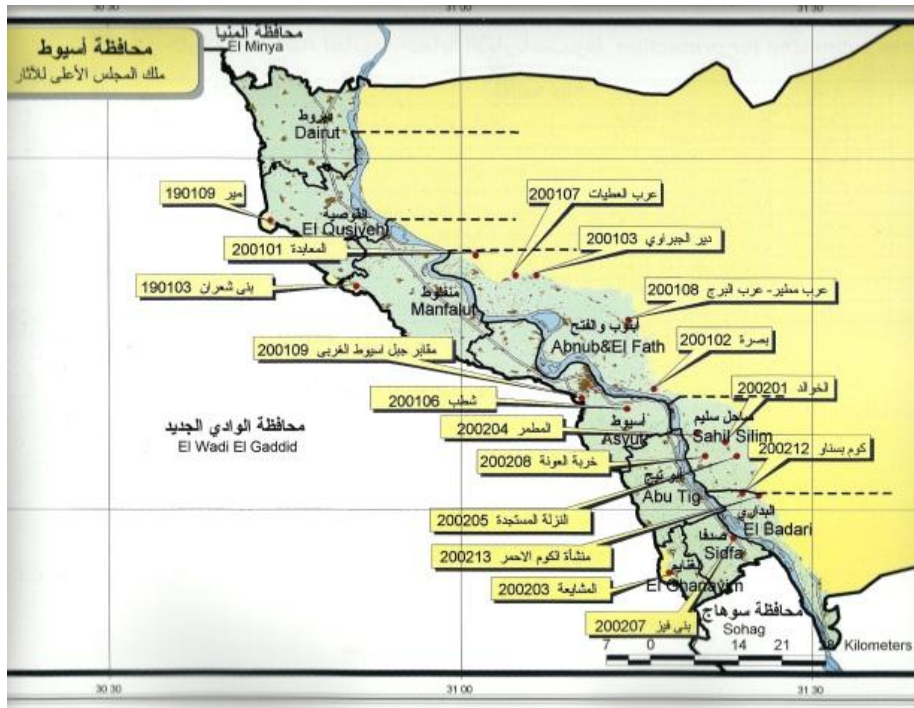
The east niches are somewhat modest in design and the largest of them is the one that precedes the altar of the Virgin Mary. The decoration inside the sanctuaries are somewhat poor.

The Roof of the Church:

The method of building this church follows the layout of the domes, as the church contains 27 domes in convergent dimensions in terms of height and area (810 cm high), while the two domes above the choir of deacons, which precedes the sanctuary of the Virgin Mary, and above the choir of deacons, which precedes the sanctuary of the martyr Mar Girgis differ in size and dimensions, as they are considered the highest domes of the church (870 cm high). These two domes have small windows in their sides and each is surmounted by a cross. As for the east part of domes above the sanctuaries, it is lower in height than other domes of the church (640 cm high).

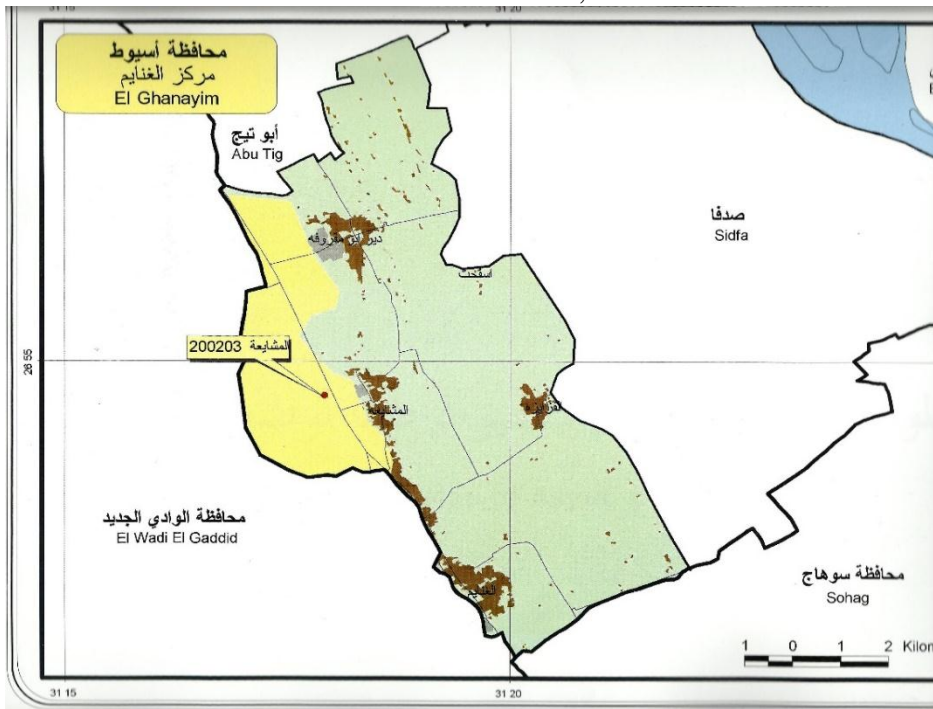
It is worth noting that most domes have circular openings for ventilation, often taking the shape of a cross.

⁸ See above.



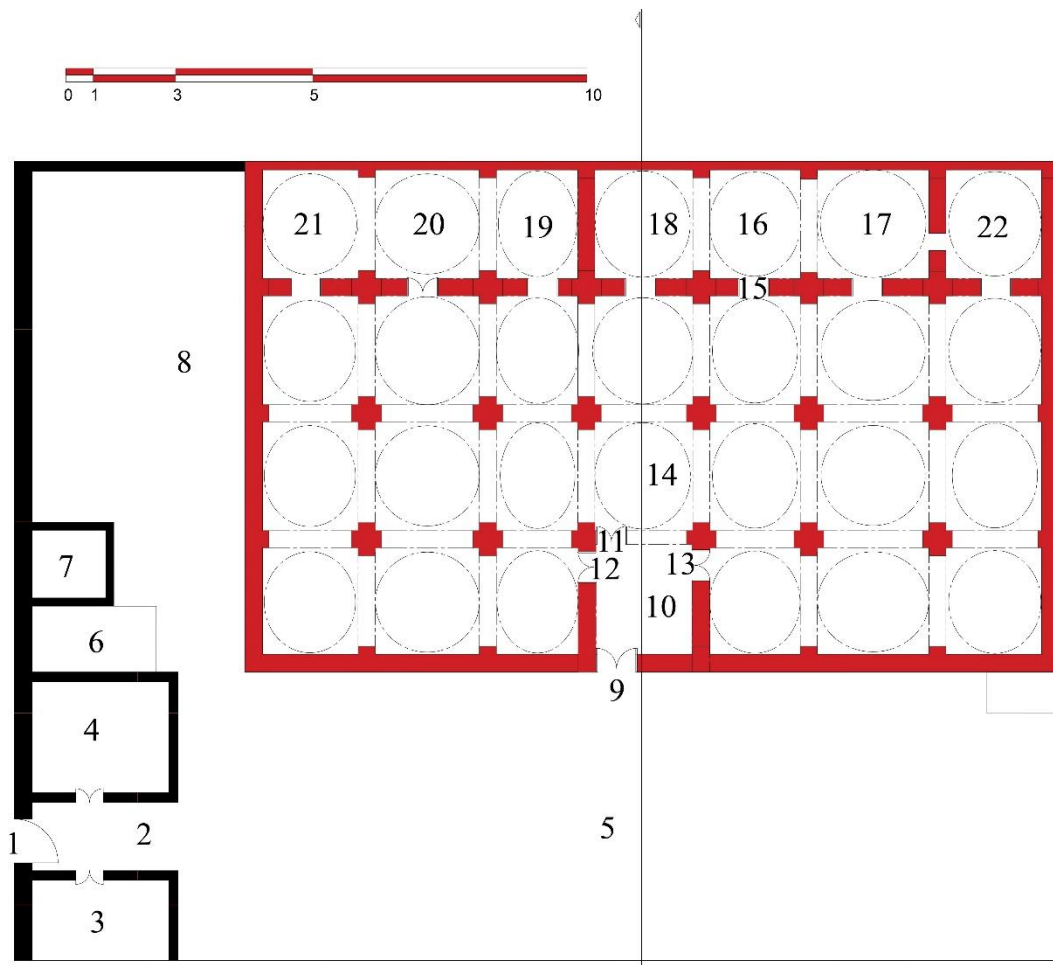
(Figure. 1) Map of Assiut governorat.

From : Raed Nabil Zaher Kamel, Woodwork in Archaeological Coptic Churches and Monasteries of Assiut, 350.



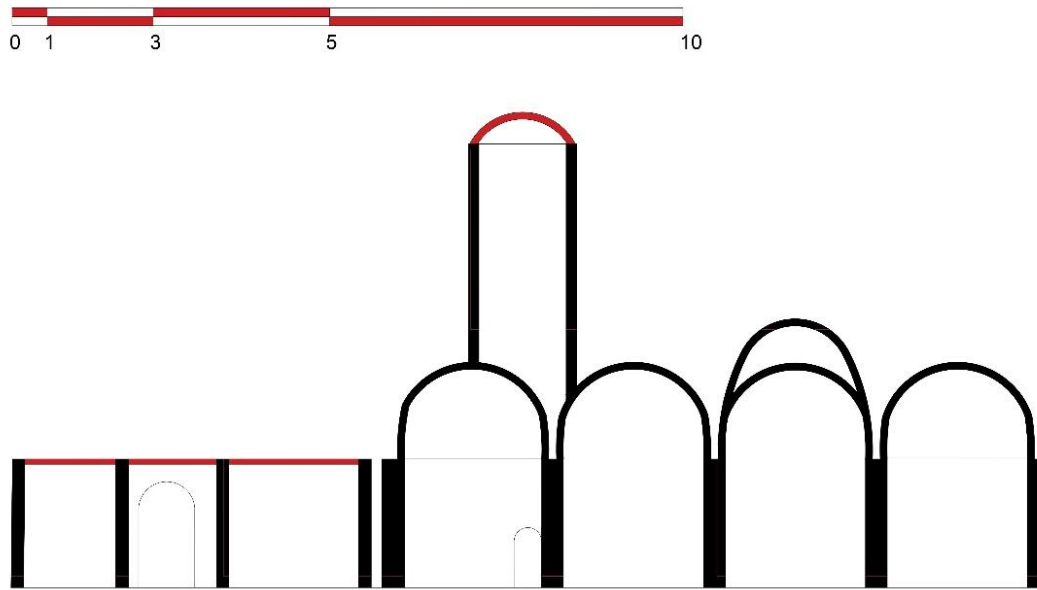
(Figure. 2) Map of El-Ghanayem town.

From : Raed Nabil Zaher Kamel, Woodwork in Archaeological Coptic Churches and Monasteries of Assiut, 352.

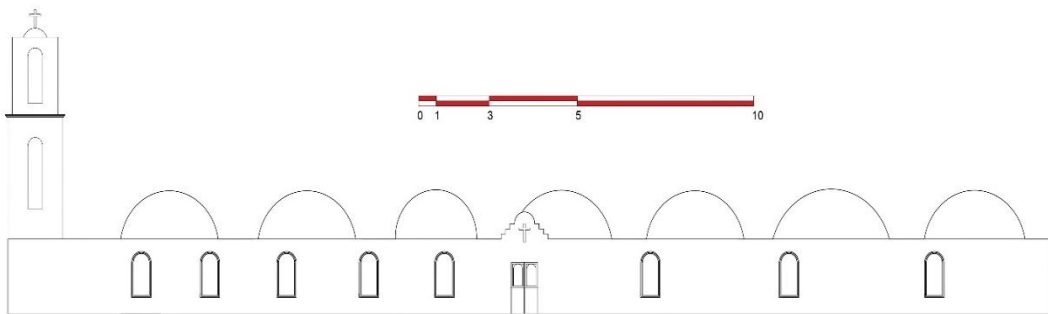


(Fig3) Plan of the first floor of the church (the researcher)

- 1- The outer western northern entrance to the church.
- 2- The entrance.
- 3- The Office for the pastor of the church.
- 4- The reception room for guests.
- 5- The courtyard.
- 6- Bathrooms.
- 7- Church Minaret:
- 8- The Side Narthex of the Church.
- 9- The Main Western Entrance of the church.
- 10- The outer narthex of the church.
- 11- The main entrance.
- 12- The southern entrance.
- 13- The northern entrance.
- 14- The nave.
- 15- The iconostasis.
- 16- The Virgin Mary's altar.
- 17- The archangel Gabriel's altar.
- 18- The archangel Michel's altar
- 19- Ibsekheron El-Queileni's altar.
- 20- St. George's altar.
- 21- St.Tekla –Hemanut's altar
- 22- The baptismal room.



(Fig. 4) Section A-A.
(Made by the researcher)



(Fig.5) Front Façade.
(Made by the researcher)



(Pl. 1) The archeological church of the Holy Virgin Mary in El-Shamyia.



(Pl. 2) The outer southern entrance to the church.



(Pl. 3)The Office for the pastor of the church and a reception room for guests.



(Pl. 4) Churchyard



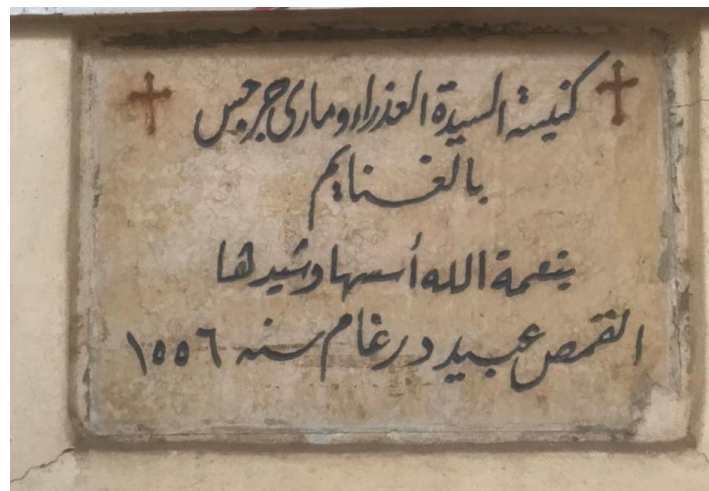
(Pl. 5) Church Minaret.



(Pl. 6) Front Façade.



(Pl. 7) The Main Western Entrance:



(Pl. 8) The restoration text



(Pl. 9) The southerb entrances of the Church.

(Pl. 10) The nourthern entrances of the Church.



(Pl. 11) one side from the church nave



(Pl. 12) one side from the church nave



(Pl. 13) the church nave



(Pl.14) One of the pillars of the church.



(Pl. 15) corner niches at the beginning of arches.



**(Pl. 16) corner niches at the beginning of arches.
Deacon's**



(Pl. 17) one of the domes.



(Pl. 18) The iconostasis of the archangel Gabriel altar



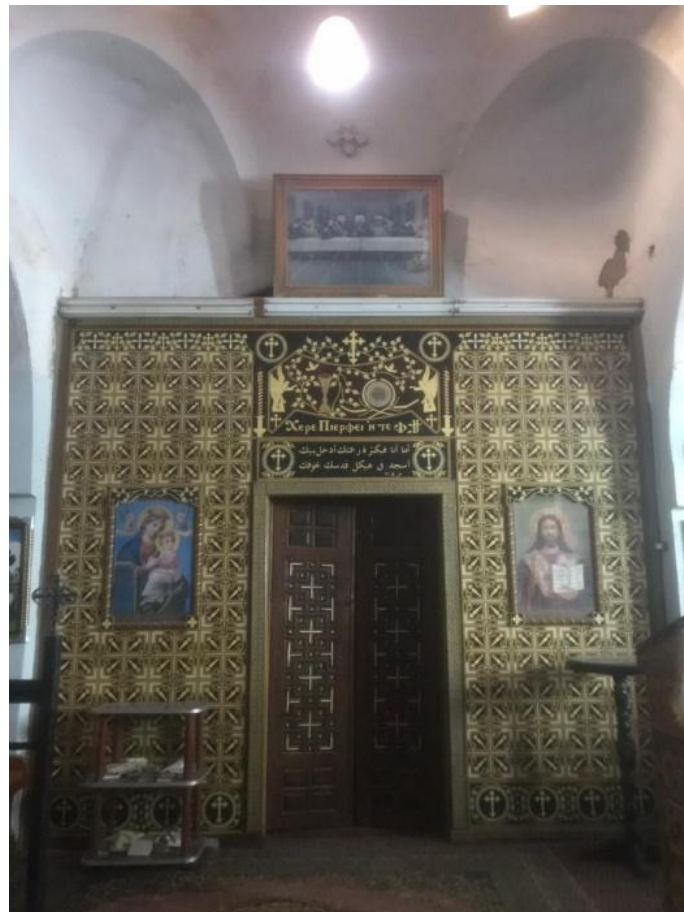
(Pl. 19) The iconostasis of the Virgin Mary altar.



(Pl. 20) The iconostasis of the archangel Michel altar



(Pl. 21) The iconostasis of Ibsekheron El-Qeileni altar



(Pl. 22) The iconostasis of St. George altar



(Pl. 23) The iconostasis of St.Tekla –Hemanut altar



(Pl. 24) The domes and Roof of the Church.

Conclusion:

This study aims to identify the ancient Church of The Holy Virgin Mary and St. George Church in EL-Ghanaye , which was not published before. It is located in the EL-Ghanayem, Assiut Governorate.. Unfortunately, despite all ancientness of this church, it was not mentioned in the ancient books of history.

- This study records the church has a strange outline as it contains 27 domes, which is not common in the construction of churches. Despite it shows one of the rare outlines in the construction of churches
- This study records the architectural outline of the church, which is published for the first time in this research.
This study records the horizontal and vertical projections, which is published for the first time in this research.

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