John the Baptist in the Monastic Art of Late Antique and Medieval Egypt: Continuities and Changes

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A thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Classical Studies

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Abstract

This study, "John the Baptist in the Monastic Art of Late Antique and Medieval Egypt: Continuities and Changes," investigates the depictions of John the Baptist in Egyptian monastic wall paintings from the sixth to the thirteenth century. This research addresses a gap in the scholarship by cataloging and analyzing these representations, which have not been comprehensively studied before. The dissertation is structured into three main categories: narrative images, deesis compositions, and individual depictions. The analysis of these categories seeks to answer the question: how is John the Baptist represented in the Late Antique and medieval Christian wall paintings of monasteries in Egypt?

Each category of painting illustrates how versatile the figure of John the Baptist was to the ancient viewer. The narrative images focus on key episodes from John the Baptist's life, such as his conception, early life, and the baptism of Christ. These scenes are analyzed to understand the textual sources and artistic influences that shaped their creation. The deesis compositions, which depict John the Baptist alongside Mary and Christ, are examined for their liturgical and intercessory significance. These paintings highlight John's role as forerunner and his elevated status in the heavenly court. The individual depictions of John the Baptist are explored for their symbolic meanings, emphasizing his ascetic lifestyle and his role as a prophet and forerunner of Christ.

The findings reveal a diverse range of artistic styles and iconographic elements, reflecting both classical and medieval influences. The study identifies common attributes used to depict John the Baptist, such as his camel-hair clothing, dark hair, and the Agnus Dei symbol. It also highlights the variability in his portrayal, with some images emphasizing his asceticism and others depicting him in a more refined, heavenly context.

The thesis underscores the significance of John the Baptist in monastic art, illustrating his inspirational role for ascetics and his importance in Christian liturgy and iconography. By analyzing the evolution of his depiction over time, the study provides insights into the broader artistic and cultural trends in Late Antique and medieval Egypt. This comprehensive examination

of John the Baptist's representation in monastic art contributes to a deeper understanding of the religious and artistic landscape of the period.

Preface

Returning to my studies after a seven year 'break' and with a young family was not a decision I made lightly. Beginning this process, I knew that I would be relying heavily on my family to help me squeeze in the time for studies, but I did not initially realize how integral they would become for the completion of my degree. My mother became my informal research assistant, proof-reading and commenting on my drafts; even coming on a trip to Egypt to visit and photograph some of the art of the monasteries included in this work. My lovely girls became my cheerleaders, encouraging me to persevere everyday and dropping by my office to give me hugs. And my husband became two parents, holding everything together, while I was all too often up in my office these past years. To my family I give the largest thanks, without their encouragement, support and time none of what is written here could have come to fruition.

During this process, I was welcomed into a community of scholars who inspired, guided, and helped train me in the ways of monastic art and archaeology. These scholars include the members of 'Team Abydos', Dr. Roxanne Bélanger Sarrazin, Dr. Nicholas Hedley, Dr. Sabrina C. Higgins and Dr. Jennifer Westerfeld. I not only had the privilege of working alongside them during our 2022 and 2024 campaigns, but I also had the pleasure of travelling with them and getting to know them while in Egypt. Thank you to this team for their camaraderie and for sharing their expertise with me. As well, thank you to Dr. Matthew Adams and the workers at the Abydos excavation site for their hard work and hospitality. Their kindness and skill made for two wonderful campaigns in Egypt. To the professors at the University of Ottawa who provided excellent and engaging classes, through the challenges posed by remote teaching during the Covid 19 pandemic, thank you.

And finally, I must thank my advisor, Dr. Jitse H.F. Dijkstra. From the first email I sent to you enquiring if you would act as my reference and advisor, to the guidance you provided on writing these acknowledgements, you have been nothing but positive and encouraging. Thank you for including me in the Ibis Hypogeum Graffiti (and painting) project in Abydos and guiding me through countless drafts, translations, edits, meetings, and one long class on Coptic. I never felt than you had any doubts I could finish this project, for that I cannot thank you enough. The

opportunities you have provided me with have changed the course of my future and made me a part of something wonderful.

Labor omnia vincit.

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General Introduction

I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me;
I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.[1]

Introduction

The iconic Renaissance images of John the Baptist make this biblical figure one of the most recognizable in Christian art, right alongside the Virgin Mary and Jesus himself. The now famous attributes of the hair vest and the pilgrim's staff can also be found in the early Christian art of the Near East and Egypt, particularly in the art of early churches and monasteries. The archaeological remains of Ancient Egypt have long been studied, but the more recent material remains of Late Antiquity have largely been unexplored until the late twentieth century. With few exceptions, all monastic dwellings and churches contain wall paintings. These can be as simple as a painted niche in an eastern wall or as complex as the art found in the painted programs of the walls and ceilings of triconch churches.[2] The purpose of this art was to aid in directed prayer and effect personal transformation of the individual, through the practice of imitation, into a higher state of being. The images and scenes in the wall paintings would also serve as a reminder, for the ascetic viewer, of their purpose and the steps they need to take to fulfill the goal of having their soul saved after death.[3] Recent scholarship has been dedicated to the preservation, documentation and restoration of these important sites but as of yet, the images found in Late Antique and medieval Egyptian monastic wall paintings, including those of John the Baptist, have not been comprehensively collected or analyzed.

This *lacuna* in scholarship leads to the following question, to be addressed in this thesis: how is John the Baptist represented in the Late Antique and medieval Christian wall paintings of monasteries in Egypt? The purpose of this study will be to create a catalogue of wall paintings,

[1] Matthew 3:11. All translations of the New Testament are from the New Revised Standard Version.
[2] G. Gabra and T. Vivian, *Coptic Monasteries* (Cairo, 2002) xx.
[3] E. Bolman, 'Mimesis, Metamorphoses and Representation in Coptic Monastic Cells', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 35 (1998) 65-77 at 69-71.

organized by category and date, then perform an analysis of the images of John the Baptist in Egyptian monastic art. To accomplish this goal, we must first briefly survey the history of monasticism in Egypt, the history of scholarship on monastic archaeology in Egypt, John the Baptist's physical appearance and biography as presented in the earliest texts of the New Testament and apocryphal texts, as well as in later Christian texts which added to the narrative of his life, and the spread of his cult. This overview will provide context and background to better understand the original patrons and viewers of the wall paintings as well as what has been done in modern times to document and protect these fragile works of art. At the end of this General Introduction, we will discuss the scope of this study, its limitations and structure.

A Brief History of Monasticism in Egypt

The monasteries of Egypt provide historians with a unique opportunity to study well-preserved wall paintings from early Christian art. Wall painting technique and environment ultimately determine the longevity and quality of artistic remains available for study; the dry climate of Egypt is ideally suited for the preservation of these paintings. The large number of Christian wall paintings found in Egypt exemplify the continuation of a tradition of art ultimately tracing back to the pharaonic period of Egyptian history. Between the ninth and twelfth century, after many years of increased taxation and dwindling numbers under Arab rule, many of the once thriving monasteries were abandoned. Some filled with sand, which helped preserve the vivid wall paintings, while a small number of other monasteries remained in use through the centuries. Many monasteries went through periods of destruction, repair and refurbishment which resulted in the covering and repainting of the interior decoration.[4]

Given the broad history and variety of the monastic tradition in early Christianity, I will define here what is meant by the term 'monastic' for the purposes of this research. Egypt has been credited as 'the birthplace of monasticism', but the origins of these early institutions are more dynamic. Monks and monasteries could be found in Near East and Egypt starting gradually, originating in the third century and then increasing rapidly in numbers during the fourth century.

[4] Gabra and Vivian, *Coptic Monasteries*, xx.

This phenomenon developed simultaneously in Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Cappadocia. Egypt was an important location for the development and preservation of early Christian monasticism, and it was home to many inspirational monastic leaders and desert fathers; as a result, some of the earliest texts on monasticism were preserved in Egypt. In the early days of the monastic movement, these individual groups did not adhere to specific rules of practice; instead, they would each determine their own style of ascetic expression and governance.[5]

Asceticism, which comes from the Greek ἀσκῆσις, meaning 'practice, training', is the foundational belief for monastic practice. Ascetics believe that to achieve closeness with God they must leave behind the world and its distractions to focus their energy on prayer by practicing poverty, fasting, abstinence and vigils. The Bible provides reference to a number of proto-ascetics, such as Elijah and John the Baptist.[6] But the practice of collectively living an ascetic life developed gradually. These communal living arrangements can be loosely assigned to two categories: coenobitic and semi-hermetic monasticism. These monasteries were built within the habitable zone of the Nile valley, on the edges of communities, and reutilized abandoned forts, tombs, temples and cave systems. For the majority of monks, to inhabit the desert was not a literal instruction, it was a literary trope and a spiritual frame of mind.[7] The semi-hermitic monasteries or *laurai* are communities of solitary ascetics who share a common chapel and food storage facility and meet weekly, or on specific feast days, to share some of the burden of the ascetic life. Some coenobitic monasteries began as semi-hermitic, becoming coenobitic later out of necessity or for security. For example, the monastery of Macarius in the Wadi el-Natrun, founded in the early fourth century by its namesake, began as semi-hermitic with many individual hermitages sharing communal buildings but was eventually forced to convert to a coenobitic monastery. This was done out of necessity beginning in the ninth century as the group was frequently attacked by raiders.[8]

Other examples show hermitages being supported by coenobitic monasteries, such as at Esna. The monks here would meet only once a week at the monastery to participate in shared prayer and a meal, and to collect supplies for the solitary week ahead.[9] The painted programs in the churches of more communal monasteries have been generally found to be in a better state of

[5] W.S.J. Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford, 2004) 425-36.
[6] Gabra and Vivian, *Coptic Monasteries*, 9.
[7] Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 422-43.
[8] H.G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of the Wâdi 'n Natrûn*, vol. 2 (New York, 1932) 393-410.
[9] E. Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte* (Warsaw, 2009) 107.

preservation than the less formal but more personal paintings found in hermitages. The art of hermitages, using the example at Esna once again, is often isolated to one or two rooms in the residence, with the bulk of the decoration and *dipinti* found in the rooms identified as oratories with niches in the east walls.[10] These decorations are often not as numerous and have not been as well preserved; hence it is the more formal art found in the churches of the semi-hermitic and coenobitic monasteries that features the most in this work.

The practice of monasticism quickly became popular and spread through the Nile valley. The result was the foundation of hundreds of monasteries in the Late Antique period beginning in the fourth century. At the same time that hermitic and semi-hermitic monasticism was burgeoning, a new form of monasticism was made popular by Pachomius, who turned to the ascetic life after encountering ascetics while serving in the Roman army. He developed a system of monasticism that attracted many to his communities, resulting in Pachomius' monasteries housing over seven thousand monks by the end of the fourth century. No remains of Pachomian monasteries have yet been discovered.[11]

History of Scholarship in Egyptian Monastic Archaeology

The field of Egyptian monastic archaeology has been slowly developing over the past century. Many of the pharaonic temple complexes contain evidence of Christians reuse, including mudbrick construction, graffiti and paintings on and around the pharaonic monuments, which were seen by some early archaeologists as a stain on the pharaonic landscape.[12] Monastic archaeology began to gain some attention in the early twentieth century because of an interest in textual remains and papyrus fragments; used in the study of the evolution of the New Testament and of other early Christian texts. The focus has changed in the past fifty years, culminating in dedicated conservation, restoration and documentation of the vibrant monastic art which remains intact from the Late Antique and medieval period.

[10] D. L. Brooks Hedstrom, *The Monastic Landscape of Late Antique Egypt* (Cambridge, 2017) 64.
[11] P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkley and Los Angeles, 1985) 74.
[12] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 9-20.

The history of monastic archaeology in Egypt can be broken up into three main phases. These three phases roughly encompass the first half of the twentieth century (1914-1945), the middle of the twentieth century (1945-1980), and the end of the twentieth century (1960-2000). Each of these periods is characterized by definite characteristics and developments in the field. The beginning of monastic exploration in the early twentieth century laid the groundwork for future work. The main projects undertaken during this time were at Saqqara, Wadi el-Natrun, Wadi Sarga and Bawit. The work done in particular at the Wadi el-Natrun established the first narrative of how ascetics came to live in the desert and form larger communities. Much of the narrative surrounding the establishment and evolution of these sites was based on written sources. The popular belief was that these works could be used as a reliable guide to the events of early monasticism during the third and fourth centuries.

The second phase covers sites which were excavated between 1945 and 1980. These projects exemplify the first excavations at monastic sites undertaken specifically to reveal monastic history and were completed in a more scientific way. Excavations were also embarked upon for the first time to document the early monastic sites that were at risk of damage from encroaching agricultural activities. The sites which best exemplify the second phase of monastic archaeology in Egypt are those of Esna, Kellia and southern Thebes (the first monastery of Phoebammon).

The third phase includes projects from 1960 to 2000 that wished to conduct examinations of monastic sites which were independent of the associated textual sources. Excavations, such as those at Naqlun, became multidisciplinary in nature so that each aspect of a project could be examined scientifically, with statistics and geography taking some of the place of philology. In particular, the data collected was examined to find patterns to explain the relationship between the site and the larger environment and external actors. This processual archaeological method was followed closely by the post-processual movement which saw a pushback against the principle that patterns of human behaviour found in the archaeological record can be predicted. The most recent scholarship of the twenty-first century has been the most progressive for this new field.

Scholars have broadened the field of Egyptian monastic study and increased access to important archaeological sites through their documentation and conservatorship. [13]

John the Baptist's Life in the Bible and Apocrypha

John the Baptist was a complicated, eschatological, early Christian figure whose identity and role in the story of Jesus was important and potentially open to interpretation in the early Christian movement. The historicity of this individual is difficult to ascertain. John is mentioned by the first-century historian Josephus, who writes that John was a good man who gathered crowds, preaching virtue and righteousness, and baptized them in water to purify their bodies and remove sins. Josephus states that John was killed by Herod because the king feared the influence that John held with the people and this killing was believed by some to have angered God, leading to his defeat.[14] Rufinus, writing in the fourth century, also mentions John the Baptist quoting Josephus directly in some places. He adds, however, that after the death of John, his body was moved from Sebaste to Alexandria because of the destruction of his tomb.[15] Early Christian accounts of John's story have him fulfilling a prophetic role where he is like Elijah in that he gathers and prepares the flock for the coming of Jesus by encouraging them to be baptized. Some scholars, however, have suggested that he was considered for a time to be himself the prophesied Messiah and the early Christian movement was briefly divided between Christians and Baptists, the so-called 'Competition Hypothesis'.

Evidence for the 'Competition Hypothesis' can be found in the gospels and the book of Acts. Several passages, which seem unnecessary to the larger context, may highlight some of the confusion which was present in the early movement.[16] These passages center on John the Baptist but focus on diminishing his role. This is done, for example, by having John tell his disciples to follow Christ or having John announce to them that he was not Christ.[17] In other scenarios, the

[13] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 42-62.
[14] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116-9.
[15] Rufinus, *Church History* 11.28.
[16] J. Marcus, *John the Baptist in History and Theology* (Columbia, 2018) 11-26.
[17] Luke 7:24-27, John 1:19-27, 1:37 and 3:28.

disciples bring up some of the confusion between the two figures saying that Jesus has been referred to as John the Baptist, Elijah or a prophet, not the Messiah.[18] Moreover, the baptisms provided by John with water are lessened in importance. For example, in the book of Acts, Paul speaks with some disciples, whom he comes across in Ephesus, and asks them who they have received baptism from. When they reply that John had baptized them, Paul says that they need a second baptism in the Holy Spirit, which he provides.[19] John's authority and similarities with Christ could have been issues that needed to be resolved, a resolution which came by clearly distinguishing the roles of Christ and John the Baptist in early Christian doctrine and art.[20]

Many texts were available to early Christian monastics in Egypt to help describe and define the life and role of John the Baptist. These texts existed as part of both the official Church doctrine as exemplified in the New Testament and later apocryphal texts such as the *Life* and *Panegyric of John the Baptist*, the *Protevangelium of James* and an *Encomium on John the Baptist*. It was these works which artists and patrons could rely upon to inspire the painted programs in the monasteries and other ascetic spaces of Egypt. John the Baptist is mentioned in several New Testament books, but it is the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John which provide the most detailed information about his life. The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke describe near identical events regarding the annunciation to Zechariah, visitation, baptism of Christ, imprisonment and death of John the Baptist. In addition, the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James* describes the flight of Elizabeth and the infant John and the death of Zechariah, during the massacre of the innocents, as well as a different version of the visitation. These early texts provide a foundation which was added to by later authors in works such as the *Life*, *Encomium* and *Panegyric*.

The three synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke tell very similar accounts of the life and purpose of John the Baptist. They provide a description of his appearance and a biography and outline of his purpose in relation to Christ. Matthew and Mark give two physical descriptions of John as well as a description of his diet and purpose. They explain that John's mission is to 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight'[21] and then they provide a description of his clothing. Matthew says that he was dressed in 'clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around

[18] Mark 8:27-9.
[19] Acts 19:3-6.
[20] J. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, 1997) 261-316.
[21] Matthew 3:1-3. Cf. Mark 1:1-3.

his waist',[22] while Mark similarly tells us that he was 'clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist'.[23] Matthew and Mark also describe his diet as comprising of 'locusts and wild honey',[24] while Luke adds that John did not eat bread or drink wine.[25]

Matthew continues his account on John in a biographical manner. Jesus comes from Galilee to be baptized by John. At first John refuses, saying that it is Jesus who should be baptizing him. But Jesus insists stating, 'it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness', upon which John relents and performs the baptism.[26] Matthew then writes that John the Baptist has been imprisoned and sends his own disciples to follow Jesus. Jesus speaks to John's character, calling him 'more than a prophet' and his messenger: 'among those born of women no one has arisen greater'.[27] Jesus explains that he was the Elijah who was foretold would come.[28] Finally, Matthew writes of the end of John's life, in which Herod imprisons him out of fear of his powers and for speaking out against him for having taken his sister-in-law, Herodias, as his wife while his brother still lives. Herod keeps John imprisoned but is hesitant to execute him because of John's popularity with the people. However, after seeing Herodias' daughter dance at his birthday celebration he swears an oath to give her anything she desires. Upon her mother's prompting, the daughter asks for John's head and so Herod orders the execution. The head is brought to Herodias and John's disciples take his body to be buried.[29] In Mark and Luke the story of John the Baptist is similarly narrated, with the addition of some details.

Luke includes episodes from the annunciation to Zechariah, and the conception and birth of John the Baptist, which are not covered by Matthew, Mark or John. Luke begins his description with the annunciation made by the Archangel Gabriel to Zechariah. While he works in the temple Gabriel appears to him and informs him that he will miraculously have a son with his barren wife Elizabeth; both are advanced in age and have not conceived any children. Gabriel explains that the son would be named John and would '… be great in the sight of the Lord'.[30] When Zechariah hears

[22] Matthew 3:4.
[23] Mark 1:6.
[24] Matthew 3:4. Cf. Mark 1:6.
[25] Luke 7:33.
[26] Matthew 3:15, Cf, Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-2.
[27] Matthew 11:9-11, Cf. Luke 7:18-28.
[28] Matthew 11:14, Cf. Mark 9:11-3.
[29] Matthew 14:8-12, Cf. Mark 6:14-29 and Luke 9:7-9.
[30] Luke 1:5-17.

this, he questions how this could be possible given their age; this displeases Gabriel and as punishment he makes Zechariah mute until the birth of John. A gathered crowd outside of the Temple bears witness to Zechariah emerging from the temple mute and they recognize that something miraculous has occurred. Next, Luke moves on to a description of the annunciation to Mary and the visitation. Luke writes that during the visitation Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, and the sound of Mary's greeting causes the unborn John to jump in his mother's womb, which fills Elizabeth with the Holy Spirit, as she proclaims that Mary is the mother of the Lord.[31] The next episode takes place shortly after John's birth; when it comes time for his circumcision and naming. Zechariah writes, since he is still mute, that the baby is to be called John, and with that action Zechariah's voice is returned.[32]

The gospel of John varies in its accounting of John the Baptist and his life. It begins by introducing John as the man who was sent from God as 'a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him'.[33] When John is confronted by the priests and Levites of Jerusalem he proclaims that he is not the son of God, the returned Elijah or a prophet, but instead he is 'the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord'.[34] When John meets Jesus, he recognizes him immediately calling him the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'.[35] Upon hearing John proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah, his two disciples, Andrew and Simon Peter, leave John to follow Christ.[36] This gospel, unlike the three other ones, does not include biographic episodes of the life of John the Baptist beyond a mention of the baptism of Christ and the imprisonment of John.[37] The majority of the gospel of John which deals with John the Baptist is concerned with defining his role as the forerunner of Christ. [38]

Moving away from the New Testament gospels, the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James* also describes episodes from the life of John the Baptist. This text primarily describes the events of the life of Mary such as her conception and childhood, and the events leading up to the birth of Christ. Since the lives of John and Christ are so intertwined in the New Testament, the

[31] Luke 1:36-45.
[32] Luke 1:57-80.
[33] John 1:7.
[34] John 1:20-23.
[35] John 1:29.
[36] John 1:35-42.
[37] John 1:29-33 for the baptism of Christ and 3:24 for the imprisonment of John.
[38] The gospel of John mentions John the Baptist in 1:6-8, 1:19-23, 1:25-40, 3:23-31 and 4:1-3.

Protevangelium of James also explains some events from the life of John the Baptist. These events include the annunciation to Zechariah, the visitation, the flight of Elizabeth and the infant John into the wilderness, and the death of Zechariah, these last two events taking place during the massacre of the innocents. The text dates to the late second century and has survived in numerous Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian and Slavonic manuscripts. Much of the text was later incorporated into another apocryphal text known as the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*. The *Protevangelium of James* was condemned by Jerome and also Pope Innocent I in 405 due to the inclusion of the older sons of Joseph from a previous marriage. This contrasted with Jerome's own interpretation of the New Testament that these individuals were the cousins of Jesus, not stepbrothers.[39] The annunciation to Zechariah and the visitation are both described in the New Testament, but the narrative of the *Protevangelium of James* sometimes differs in its description of these events.

The narrative begins with a brief mention of the annunciation to Zechariah. In this text, the annunciation is referenced in passing during another episode where Mary visits the temple and is chosen to aid in the spinning of a new curtain. The passage simply mentions that 'Zechariah became silent. Samuel took his place, until Zechariah spoke again'.[40] Moreover, the description of the visitation differs in regard to the manner of greeting shared between Mary and Elizabeth. The *Protevangelium of James* describes how when Mary knocks on the door, Elizabeth rushes to the door, opens it and blesses Mary. After the blessing, John the Baptist leaps in Elizabeth and fills her with the Holy Spirit, causing Elizabeth to proclaim Mary to be the mother of the Lord.[41] The main difference between this short episode and the New Testament version is the manner of their greeting. In Luke, Mary calls out to Elizabeth, and it is her voice that causes the in-utero John to fill his mother with the Holy Spirit, while in the *Protevangelium of James* it is the blessing given by Elizabeth to Mary which causes the baby to leap.[42]

The account continues with descriptions of events not featured in the New Testament, mainly the experience of John and his family during the massacre of the innocents. After hearing of the order by Herod to kill all children younger than two years, Elizabeth takes John, then about

[39] B. Ehrman and Z. Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (New York, 2011) 31-8.
[40] *Protevangelium of James* 10.2.
[41] *Protevangelium of James* 12.1-3.
[42] *Protevangelium of James* 12.1-3, Cf. Luke 1:36-45.

six months old, and flees into the wilderness of Judaea. While fleeing she tries to find a place to hide but cannot. Knowing that she cannot outclimb the soldiers behind her, she cries out 'Mountain of God, receive a mother with her child … And straightaway the mountain split open and received her'.[43] The next passage deals with the death of Zechariah. During this episode he is at the temple conducting his duties as a high priest, when he is approached by soldiers and asked where his son has gone. Zechariah replies that he has been at the temple and does not know. This response is reported to Herod and angers him, so that he sends his soldiers back. When Zechariah does not provide a different response upon being questioned a second time, the soldiers murder him.[44] The New Testament gospels and the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James* provide a biographical baseline for later Christian authors and artists. The later texts attempt to refine and elaborate on the themes and episodes written in these earliest works.

John the Baptist's Life in Later Christian Texts

The later Christian texts which seek to provide some additional information regarding the early life of John the Baptist include the *Life* of, and an *Encomium* and *Panegyric* on John the Baptist. The oldest text, the *Life*, is attributed to Bishop Serapion of Thmouis and was written at the end of the fourth century. This text includes descriptions of the parentage, conception and childhood of John based on the events described in the New Testament and the *Protevangelium of James*. The *Life* elaborates on the events after the massacre of the innocents and explains that John receives his iconic wardrobe from an angel. He then spends his childhood in the wilderness protected by angels and the soul of his mother. Finally, the narrative ends when John leaves the wilderness to prepare for the coming of the Messiah and the story continues as described in the gospels. The text includes the treatment of John's body after his death and explains the circumstances surrounding its arrival in Alexandria. Once his relics arrived in Alexandria, the text describes how a church was built in his name by Archbishop Theophilus and how miracles were attributed to his shrine. The Coptic *Panegyric on John the Baptist*, dated to between the sixth and ninth centuries and attributed

[43] *Protevangelium of James* 22.3.
[44] *Protevangelium of James* 23.1-3.

to Archbishop Theodosius of Alexandria, combines the information from the *Life* and the gospel texts together in one text.

The *Encomium on John the Baptist* is the latest of the texts covered here. Like the *Panegyric*, it contains materials from multiple texts which revolve around John the Baptist. Because the text is a compilation, the proposed date of the *Encomium* is a range of as early as the sixth and as late as the tenth century. The main theme of the text is to glorify and extol John, placing him above those living and those in Heaven, including even the angels. Instructions are provided for the faithful which explain that in order to be admitted into the Third Heaven they must revere John while they are alive on earth. This reverence must take place in the form of 'an offering or by means of a love-feast or by means of a charitable gift that is given to the poor'.[45] In terms of the biographical events covered by this work, the focus is mainly on the events of the massacre of the innocents and the flight of Elizabeth and John. These episodes are a repetition of the accounts written in the *Protevangelium of James*. The text describes Elizabeth and John fleeing while being pursued by soldiers. When Elizabeth realizes that she cannot outrun them she calls out to the mountain saying 'Rock, receive me inside of you along with my son'.[46] The mountain acquiesces, admitting them and protecting them from the elements until John leaves to begin his preparation of the flock.

Also described here, solely by the *Encomium*, is John's place and role in Heaven. The text describes how John received dominion over the Third Heaven for the sacrifices he made on earth. The Third Heaven is described as a place of grandeur, where John has been reunited with his parents and no longer lives as an ascetic. The entire family is described as 'wearing precious stones of scarlet and stones of every colour' and having 'fields full of fruits'.[47] John not only resides in this place with his family, but he is also responsible for accompanying the worthy across a river of fire, in a golden boat, to admit them to this paradise. Those who have worshipped John on earth will pass through the water as if through a bath, but those who have not will not be able to pass.[48] This text presents a shift in the representation of John. Instead of being described in his usual ascetic appearance and making ready the way for the Messiah, he is presented here in his place of

[45] *Encomium on John the Baptist* 16.3-4.
[46] *Encomium on John the Baptist* 11.1-4, Cf. *Protevangelium of James* 22.3.
[47] *Encomium on John the Baptist* 15.1-3 and 18.1-2.
[48] *Encomium*, *on John the Baptist* 17.1-4.

honour, dressed resplendently with his parents in Heaven. This alternate physical description and addition to the biography of John the Baptist offers another choice when depicting John in art. He no longer needs to be relegated to his appearance in life but can be shown as he appears in Heaven after having attained the highest achievement of an ascetic.

The New Testament gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke provided the foundation for the appearance, role, and biographical events of the life of John the Baptist. These gospels describe the annunciation, visitation, birth, naming, and baptism of Christ, and the death and imprisonment of John. This narrative was then expanded with the additional episodes added by the *Protevangelium of James* with the flight of Elizabeth and John into the wilderness, the death of Zechariah in the Temple and the life of John in the wilderness. The later texts beginning with the *Life* of and *Panegyric* on John the Baptist fill in perceived gaps in this narrative by writing that John and his mother Elizabeth are forced to flee into the wilderness of Judaea to escape the tyranny of Herod, the same incident which caused Jesus to be taken to Egypt by Mary and Joseph. John remains in the wilderness until it is his time to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. After living a solitary existence in the wilderness, surviving on locusts and honey for sustenance, John emerges and begins to preach and prophesy the coming of the Messiah and Judgement Day. Then to this the *Encomium* adds that John was rewarded for his sacrifice on earth by being reunited with his parents and given dominion over the Third Heaven.

After his death, John the Baptist was venerated for being a founder of the Christian faith, creator of a core sacrament and as a model for the ascetic life. These qualities gave John a cult-like following which spread out from Palestine and into Egypt due in part to his popularity among monks. This popularity in turn led to the reproduction of John's likeness in the art of the monasteries of Egypt, placed right alongside images of Christ and Mary. According to the gospels, John the Baptist's appearance was likened to that of his prophet predecessor Elijah, but where Elijah is described as a 'hairy man' who wore a leather belt around his tunic at the waist, John is described as wearing camel-hair, fastened with a leather belt at the waist. This similarity would have been enough for the ancient audience to associate John the Baptist with Elijah, perhaps even as the promised return of Elijah, but in a different form for the 'End Times'. It is this associating with the apocalypse and extreme asceticism which made John the Baptist such a popular devotional figure in monastic art.

The Cult of John the Baptist

After the death of John the Baptist, Rufinus and the *Life of John the Baptist* describe that his remains were buried in Sebaste. However, in the fourth century his tomb was desecrated. His remains and the relics of his raiment were recovered by his followers and sent to Athanasius in Alexandria for safekeeping. After being taken to Alexandria, a *martyrium* was built to house the body and relics using funds purportedly obtained by raiding the Serapeum at Alexandria.[49] While the circumstances leading to the construction of the church are likely exaggerated, confirmation that a *martyrium* was constructed in Alexandria can be found in a papyrus fragment dated to the end of the fifth century. From the fifth century onwards, churches and monasteries dedicated to John the Baptist are found mentioned in other papyrus fragments, from Oxyrhynchus, Hermopolis and Magdola spreading up the Nile.[50] Beginning with the translation of his remains, John the Baptist became an extremely popular saint in Egypt, venerated alongside the Virgin Mary and Mark the evangelist. The papyrological and epigraphical evidence helps to trace the popularity of John the Baptist out from Alexandria. While this is not an exhaustive list of references, it serves as an indication of the spread of the worship of John the Baptist after the foundation of the *martyrium* in Alexandria.

The monument built for John the Baptist in Alexandria was said to be ornate, built using funds supposedly taken from temples and gathered from generous church benefactors. The tomb and relics of the saint were said to have life-saving abilities and so brought many devotees to the church. There the coffin of John the Baptist was dressed with a tunic, a hooded cape made from hair and a leather belt. The pilgrims to this site would remove their clothing, leave them on the tomb, and receive blessed holy oil. The *martyrium* was also used as a depository for the relics of other saints, the final resting place of some Church leaders, and later also for the regular citizens of Alexandria. When the building eventually was no longer available for new burials, families brought their deceased to a tomb behind the *martyrium*, a practice which continued into the Middle

[49] Rufinus, *Church History* 11.28 and *Life of John the Baptist*, pp. 253-7 Mingana.
[50] A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides* (Paris, 2001) 112-4.

Ages.[51] The *martyrium* is traditionally one of the oldest and most famous churches of Egypt. Whether or not the *martyrium* of John the Baptist was built directly on the former site of the Serapeum, as claimed by Rufinus, is a matter of debate. Some Christian artifacts have been recovered from the site, but not enough to give a clear indication as to the size or style of the church built on the remains.[52]

Scope, Limitations and Plan of the Thesis

This study, as stated above in the introductory section, will focus on the monastic wall paintings from Egypt dating to the Late Antique and medieval period that represent John the Baptist or his parents. Here I will clarify the scope of the evidence that will be examined. The terms wall paintings, Egypt, as well as Late Antique and medieval can all be interpreted broadly and require some clarification. When mentioning the term monastic, regardless of the type of monastic setting, coenobitic, semi-hermitic or hermitic, all wall paintings will be considered. The painted art of icons and any other painted works completed on portable items or textiles will be excluded. To restrict the geographical field, I will be examining the monasteries found in Egypt but excluding those in the Sinai Peninsula as it was under the control of the Bishop of Jerusalem and not Alexandria at this time.[53]

In terms of the scope of time, Egypt was a province of the Eastern Roman empire, after the division of 395, and remained so until the Arab conquest of Egypt in 641/642. The state of monasticism did not quickly decline after the change in governance, and, in fact, we can see that some monasteries continued to be inhabited and renovated from the seventh to the thirteenth century. However, the introduction of taxes along with increasing periods of persecution, as well as the confiscation of property, resulted in the near total abandonment of monasteries by the sixteenth century.[54] In order to provide sufficient examples of paintings for analysis, I will be

[51] J. Gascou, *Églises et chapelles d'Alexandrie byzantine* (Paris, 2020) 39-42.
[52] J.H.F. Dijkstra, 'The Fate of the Temples in Late Antique Egypt', in L. Lavan and M. Mulryan (eds), *The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism'* (Leiden, 2011) 389-436 and Gascou, *Églises*, 35-8.
[53] R. Price and M.Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* (Liverpool, 2005) 49.
[54] Gabra and Vivian, *Coptic Monasteries*, xxv-xxvi.

examining paintings from Late Antiquity into the medieval period. An examination of the wall paintings over a longer period of time will, I believe, be more representative of the complete catalogue of wall paintings of John the Baptist and will allow for the discernment of evolutions in his portrayal.

The novelty of the field of studying Late Antique and medieval monastic wall paintings presents a challenge when searching for material evidence of our subject matter, John the Baptist. The thorough conservation and documentation work performed for example at the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea and the Red Monastery at Sohag were completed within the last twenty years. Sadly, other monastic wall paintings have not yet received the same amount of attention. Even for the monasteries that have received some archaeological attention, the publications do not always provide photographs or descriptions of the exact composition or figures used in the wall paintings. The age and availability of murals for conservation presents another issue. Wall paintings are extremely fragile and sensitive to movement, water and wind exposure. While the Egyptian climate is not known for copious precipitation, it can experience seismic activity which cracks and loosens the fragile plaster walls. A further challenge is that some monasteries, after many years of use, have painted new wall paintings over Late Antique and medieval originals. This limits the availability of material for examination and does in turn limit the accuracy of any correlations or conclusions made during the analysis.

In order to determine how John the Baptist is represented in the Late Antique and medieval wall paintings of Egyptian monasteries, the first thing to do is to collect all the data. This catalogue of data, which forms the foundation for this study, can be found below in Appendix 1. The paintings have been divided into three categories and then ordered chronologically within these categories, with references to the entries in the catalogue are provided in bold. Thus, **7** refers to catalogue entry no. 7, where all information about the painting can be found (publication, location, date, figure number[s], and brief description of what is represented). Appendix 2 contains the figures of the paintings listed in the catalogue of Appendix 1.

To facilitate analysis, the ensuing chapters will divide the paintings into three types: narrative images (**1**-**13**), *deesis* or intercessory depictions (**14**-**18**) and individual depictions (**19**-**27**). Narrative paintings are paintings which depict a narrative scene that goes back to a specific story. They can be standalone or a series of scenes which forms a longer narrative frieze. These

images are not always simple literal representations of textual sources, but they can often at least be connected to a specific textual reference.[55] *Deesis* or intercessory scenes act as a liturgical device by which the petitioner provides their prayers to the represented figures who directly transmit their prayers to God.[56] Individual depictions or non-narrative images represent themes or ideals instead of being a direct representation of a textual reference. They can be difficult to construe as they are open to interpretation.[57] We understand these divisions are arbitrary, and some paintings could be considered under more than one category. Each chapter will include a detailed description of the paintings that fall under the category in question, looking for patterns in the way John the Baptist is portrayed, as well as any changes in his depiction over time. The results will be summarized at the end of each chapter, and considered in the General Conclusion, which aims to give an informed response to the research question.

[55] R.M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London and New York, 2000) 75-9.
[56] P. Murray and L. Murray, 'Deësis, Deisis', in T. Devonshire Jones (ed.), *Dictionary of Christian Art and Architecture* (Oxford, 2013) 146.
[57] Jensen, *Early Christian Art*, 32.

Chapter 1
Narrative Images of John the Baptist

When one hears the name John the Baptist, the images that immediately come to mind draw from the Renaissance masters of Italy such as DaVinci, Caravaggio and Raphael. John the Baptist is most recognizable in narrative art as the baptizer of Christ, painted as described by the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. However, the narrative art of the Renaissance and Late Antiquity concerning John the Baptist also features other episodes from his life, including the story of his conception and early life as well as his time in the wilderness and death. As discussed in the General Introduction, these narratives derive primarily from the New Testament gospels, the apocryphal *Protevangelium of James*, as well as the *Life* of and *Panegyric* of John the Baptist. In these texts the life of John the Baptist comprises a few notable episodes: the annunciation of John's birth to Zechariah, the flight with his mother Elizabeth into the wilderness of Judaea, the murder of Zechariah in the temple, the emergence of John from the wilderness, the baptism of Christ in the river Jordan and, finally, his imprisonment and execution.

The similarities in the stories of the lives of John the Baptist and Christ resulted in a need for the early Church to clearly define the role of John the Baptist as a prophet and forerunner to Christ and not as the Messiah himself. The primary issue is concerned with how Christ could be baptized by John as this grants an authority to John the Baptist over Christ which would be contrary to the authority of Christ as the son of God. Later ecclesiastical authors proposed that by baptizing Christ in the Jordan river the water was blessed, which legitimized future baptisms performed.[58] Another work, the *Panegyric* to John the Baptist, puts forward the theory that during the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth at the visitation, John the Baptist becomes baptized by Christ in his mother's womb. Therefore, when they later met on the banks of the Jordan river, John could immediately recognize Christ as the Messiah.[59]

The narrative scenes introduced by these works feature the individuals who were central to the life of John the Baptist, his parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, and Christ. Given their importance, these figures are heavily represented in the narrative scenes of the life of John the

[58] Taylor, *Immerser*, 261-316.
[59] *Panegyric on John the Baptist* 10.1-3.

Baptist. Some narrative scenes regarding the conception of John and the death of his father Zechariah do not actually portray John himself but have been included in this study as they illustrate important moments in the greater life of John the Baptist. The presence of multiple scenes making a frieze of images from the life of John also possibly indicates that the space was used in the worship of John the Baptist and could aid in tracking the spread of his cult.[60] Moreover, given the competing narratives between the New Testament and apocryphal texts concerning the life of John the Baptist, the paintings could provide clues as to which texts served as the inspiration for the art painted as well as which texts were the most influential to the painters and patrons. Details in these narratives focus primarily on specifics such as who was present and what was said and done. This is unlike a traditional work of fiction, where the details regarding the scenery and emotions of characters are described by an omniscient author. This results in varied interpretations of these works by artists when translating the written accounts into painted images.

The locations which have been found to contain narrative scenes concerning the life of John the Baptist are the Quarry Church dedicated to John the Baptist at the monastery of Deir Abu Hennes (**1**-**5**), Chapels XVII, XXX and LI at the monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit (**6**-**9**), the church of Macarius at the monastery of Macarius (**10**) and the church of Holy Virgin at Deir el-Baramus (**11**-**12**) in the Wadi el-Natrun, and the monastery of Paul the Hermit (**13**). The narrative scenes span in date from the sixth to the thirteenth centuries. The earliest of these paintings at Deir Abu Hennes and Bawit cannot be dated exactly and are therefore provided with a date range which spans three centuries, from the sixth to the eighth century. These examples do not represent the entirety of narrative paintings featuring the life of John the Baptist to be found in the monasteries of Egypt. Paintings which are no longer extant and exist solely as mentions in other works with no published image or description are not included for analysis in this chapter.

[60] Papaconstantinou, C*ulte des saints*, 112-5.

*Quarry Church Dedicated to John the Baptist, Monastery of Deir Abu Hennes (**1-5**)*

The first monastery to be examined is the monastery of Deir Abu Hennes, which was established in a former New Kingdom limestone quarry on the east bank of the Nile.[61] In ancient times, the town of Deir Abu Hennes was just south of the provincial capital of Antinoöpolis, founded by the Emperor Hadrian on his visit in 130/132.[62] The name of the specific monastic community which lived in the former quarry is thus far unknown as no written sources have been discovered which mention the site or to whom it could have been dedicated. Starting in approximately the fourth century, the limestone quarry became the site of a semi-hermitic community of around one hundred and thirty individuals, inhabited until the eighth century.[63] The semi-hermitic site follows a pattern of spread-out rock-cut and stone built hermitages, connected by small winding paths which lead to the communal building. However, given the enclosed topographical nature of a quarry, all the hermitages at Abu Hennes were built much closer together than would be found in other more open spaces.[64]

The nearby provincial capital of Antinoöpolis was an important Christian center, supporting a Christian community starting in the early third century. In the fourth century an episcopal see was installed with a bishop's residence and church; the city became a pilgrimage destination in the same century for the cult of Colluthus, the physician saint. The quarry monastery at Abu Hennes shows evidence of visitor traffic through the preservation of hundreds of graffiti, representing a multitude of visitors from far and wide; inscriptions have been found in Greek, Coptic, Syriac and Ge'ez. These graffiti provide the names of the visitors to the site and many invoke John the Baptist as an intercessor in their prayers; but unfortunately, as is often the case with graffiti, the inscriptions do not mention a specific date.[65] The inscriptions do, however, help to confirm that this site was monastic in nature. Some inscriptions list the roles of members from

[61] A. Delattre, 'Graffiti from Christian Egypt and the Cult of Saints', in A. Felle, B. Ward-Perkins (eds), *Cultic Graffiti in the Late Antique Mediterranean and Beyond* (Turnhout, 2021) 103-10.
[62] G. van Loon, '"…That the Mountain of the Wilderness May Be Inhabited…"': Saint John the Baptist in Infancy Scenes in the Narthex of the Quarry Church of Dayr Abu Hinnis', in A. Łajtar, A. Obłuski, I. Zych (eds), *Aegyptus et Nubia Christiana* (Warsaw, 2016) 257-79.
[63] Delattre, 'Graffiti from Christian Egypt', 104-5.
[64] G. van Loon and V. de Laet, 'Monastic Settlements in Dayr Abu Hinnis (Middle Egypt): The Spatial Perspective', in E.R. O'Connell (ed.), *Egypt in the First Millennium AD* (Leuven, 2014) 157-75.
[65] Van Loon and De Laet, 'Monastic Settlements', 163-4.

this community, including priests, stewards, and lectors. Based on evaluations of the site, it is hypothesized that the space could have been inhabited by seventy to eighty monks in the northern part and forty to fifty monks in the southern part of the quarry. It has been suggested by some that the quarry supported two separate monastic communities, one in the north end serviced by the fifth century church in the village of Abu Hennes and a second monastery in the south which was served by the rock-cut church in the quarry.[66] The community would have needed a connection to supports from outside of the quarry, primarily due to the lack of fresh water in the quarry proper. Nevertheless, the full extent of the relationships between the Christian communities of Deir Abu Hennes, in the town and the quarry, is unknown at present.[67]

The quarry monastery of Deir Abu Hennes was first discovered in the seventeenth century by Johann Michael Wansleben, but no scientific documentation was published until images of the site were published by Wladimir de Bock in 1901. Next, Jean Clédat published site descriptions and water colour reproductions of the paintings he observed at the site in 1902.[68] Two projects in the 1970s added to the site documentation of Deir Abu Hennes, the first by Jean Doresse in 1971. The second in 1978 by Rostislav Hoelthoer, completed additional documentation with a focus on the wall paintings and inscriptions; however, the latter work was never published.[69] The most recent work started in 2004, by Gertrud van Loon and Alain Delattre, used the work by Hoelthoer as a foundation for further research and analysis of the site, resulting in numerous publications.[70] Given the lack of hagiographical works and papyrological references to Abu Hennes and its adjacent quarries, the archaeological record together with the inscriptions are the sole sources of information for analysis of the site.[71]

The church in the southern portion of the quarry, built into the cliffs, is posited to be dedicated to John the Baptist due to the painted iconography within the church and the graffiti invoking his name found throughout the quarry. The space is oriented on a north-south axis and

[66] P. Grossman, 'Dayr Abu Hinnis: Cave Church Paintings', in P. Finney (ed.), *Eerdman's Encyclopedia of Early Christian Art and Archaeology*, vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, 2017) 400-2.
[67] Van Loon and De Laet, 'Monastic Settlements' 157-175 and Delattre, 'Graffiti from Christian Egypt', 104.
[68] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', 41-70, Pl. II and V.
[69] G. van Loon and A. Delattre, 'Le cycle de l'enfance du Christ dan l'église rupestre de Saint-Jean Baptist à Deir Abou Hennis', in A. Boud'hors, J. Gascou, D. Vaillancourt (eds), *Études Coptes IX* (Paris, 2006) 119-34.
[70] Delattre, 'Graffiti from Christian Egypt', 104.
[71] Van Loon and De Laet, 'Monastic Settlements', 163.

measures 32 by 9 by 15 meters.[72] The church uses the natural stone rock faces of the quarry for two of its walls as well as its roof. The rest of the walls enclosing the church and dividing the space were added by the monks at an unknown date. Windows existed in ancient times but were sealed in the modern era to protect the wall paintings which had suffered from natural and purposeful destruction over time. The northernmost area of the church was used as the nave and sanctuary, the western room was used as a baptistry and the eastern room as a narthex; wall paintings can be found in all of these spaces.[73] Three layers of wall painting were identified in the rock-cut church, the latest being where we find the painted narrative scenes of the life of John the Baptist.[74] All of the painted scenes and figures were done in the same style and therefore can be dated homogeneously. It has been proposed that these paintings do not date earlier than the sixth century.[75] More recent research concurs with this *terminus post quem* and provides a range for the dating of the paintings of having been created between the sixth and eighth centuries, most likely within the first half of this range.[76]

The rock-cut church dedicated to John the Baptist at Deir Abu Hennes contains both narrative and individual images related to John, of which the latter will be described in detail in Chapter 3. The narrative images are located in two friezes which portray scenes from his early life and conception. The first frieze, retelling the conception of John and the coming about of his physical life, is located in the baptistry along the east wall. The scenes which survive from this narrative sequence begin with the annunciation to Zechariah (**1**), next a scene where Zechariah is shown struck dumb (**2**), then a scene which is hypothesized to be a meeting between Elizabeth and Zechariah (**3**) and finally the annunciation to Mary. [77] More scenes may have followed these three, but loss of painted plaster makes this impossible to ascertain. The second narrative sequence is painted in the narthex of the church and depicts the series of events that leads up to the beginning of John the Baptist's ascetic life in the wilderness. This frieze begins with the massacre of the innocents, then the flight of Elizabeth and John into the wilderness (**4**), next the murder of Zechariah on the steps of the temple (**5**), then Joseph's dream and finally the flight of the Holy

[72] Van Loon, '"…That the Mountain of the Holy Wilderness…"', 257.
[73] Van Loon and De Laet, 'Monastic Settlements', 164.
[74] Van Loon and Delattre, 'Cycle de l'enfance', 123.
[75] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', 47.
[76] Van Loon, '"…That the Mountain of the Holy Wilderness…"', 260.
[77] Van Loon, '"…That the Mountain of the Holy Wilderness…"', 258.

Family to Egypt. All of the paintings in the church of John the Baptist were intentionally damaged at some point post creation, with the damage being directed primarily towards the faces of the painted figures.[78] Despite this damage, much can still be observed regarding the narrative scenes from the figures' positions, gestures, costumes, legends, and the background decoration. Watercolour copies of these paintings, as said, were completed by Clédat in 1902 and later, in 2006, photographs were made by Delattre and Van Loon. Because of the century-long difference in dates between the watercolour representations and the photographs, some of what has been captured in the watercolour paintings is no longer visible in the photographs.[79]

The conception narrative frieze of John the Baptist in the baptistry begins with the annunciation to Zechariah by the Archangel Gabriel, as described in the Gospel of Luke and the *Protevangelium of James*.[80] This painted scene of the annunciation shows the Archangel Gabriel as the first figure of the frieze facing left towards Zechariah (**1**). The two figures are shown against the background of the temple, Zechariah in front of a curtain and Gabriel at the top of some steps, with ornate panelling and crown moulding behind. The nimbate Gabriel is shown wearing a pale tunic with a yellow cloak. The head of Gabriel has been largely destroyed; however, enough remains of the *nimbus* and the neck of the figure to determine that Gabriel's hair must have been short.[81] Zechariah, also nimbate, is opposite, shown on a slightly lower level of the scene, swinging his censer. In all three representations of Zechariah throughout the frieze, he is dressed identically. His wardrobe is comprised of layered tunics: the base layer is a pale-yellow, long-sleeved tunic which falls to Zechariah's ankle, on top of which is another more decorated tunic which falls to just below the knee. This decorated tunic is yellow in colour with a thick red band at roughly hip height as well as a red band at the hem and is decorated with two red squares and two tassels which come out of the thick red hip band. The outfit is completed by a yellow cloak, fastened mid chest, which falls to the mid-calf, also bordered by red trim.[82] In the scene of the annunciation to Zechariah, his hair is depicted long and curled, in a dark shade highlighted with red. Above the border of the painted scenes are legends describing the images below. For the scene of the

[78] Van Loon and Delattre, 'Cycle de l'enfance', 122.
[79] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', Pls. I-IV and Van Loon and Delattre, 'Le cycle de l'enfance' 131-4.
[80] Luke 1:5-17 and *Protevangelium of James*, 10:2.
[81] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', Pl. V.
[82] G. van Loon, 'Priest and Father, Prophet and Martyr: Zechariah, Parent of Saint John the Baptist', in M. Eaton-Krauss, C. Fluck, G. van Loon (eds), *Egypt 1350 BC – AD 1800: Art Historical and Archaeological Studies for Gawdat Gabra* (Wiesbaden, 2011) 87-110.

annunciation the Coptic text, as recorded, describes this scene as [ⲅ]ⲁ̣ⲃⲣⲏⲗ ⲉϥϣⲁϫⲉ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲍⲁⲭⲁⲣⲓⲁⲥ which translates as 'Gabriel speaking to Zechariah'.[83]

The next scene in the frieze has the nimbed Zechariah turned facing right, towards a crowd of five beardless men bearing staffs (**2**). This crowd was identified by Clédat as the children of Judaea, although no legend remains. The scene is shown against a deep yellow background and the corners of two buildings, the temple from the previous annunciation scene and the house from the next scene in which Zechariah speaks with Elizabeth. Zechariah is depicted with a different style of hair here; it has been turned white and wavy, perhaps transformed by his encounter with the divine. Zechariah gestures with his left hand towards his mouth, no longer *in situ*, and with his right towards the gathered crowd. The legend above describes this scene as ⲍⲁⲭⲁⲣⲓⲁⲥ ⲉϥϣⲉϫⲉ ⲛⲏⲁⲁⲁⲥ (read ⲉϥϣⲁϫⲉ ⲛⲛⲓⲟⲩⲇⲁⲓ) which translates as 'Zechariah speaking to the Jews'. [84]

The last image in this frieze shows Zechariah with an unknown seated figure in front of a small building (**3**). Zechariah is shown again with long, pale, wavy hair. The unidentified figure to his left is nimbate and has raised their right hand into a two fingered blessing. The figure wears a red cloak over a yellow garment, but damage to this painting prevents any further observation or even a determination as to the gender of the individual. The theme of this part of the frieze is not as clear as the previous two paintings, the only indication as to what is taking place is the Coptic legend where it is written ⲍⲁⲭⲁⲣⲓⲁⲥ ⲉϥϣⲁϫⲉ (?), which translates as 'Zechariah speaking to …'. This unfortunately does not identify the second figure; one suggestion is that this scene shows Zechariah speaking with Elizabeth, his wife.[85] However, given the damage to the painting and the lack of a name in the legend, making a determination is difficult.

The second narrative frieze, found in the narthex, is bordered above by a band of ornamental plants in yellow, red, green and black, and below by a band of white, yellow, red and black decoration. As with the previous frieze in the baptistry, the images used to examine these paintings were initially recorded in watercolour by Clédat and then photographed by Delattre and Van Loon.[86] The narrative frieze begins on the north wall with the massacre of the innocents and

[83] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', Pl. V.
[84] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', Pl. V.
[85] Van Loon and Delattre, 'Le Cycle de l'enfance', 122.
[86] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', Pls. I-V and Van Loon and Delattre, 'Cycle de l'enfance', 131-34.

a throned Herod. The second scene depicts the flight of Elizabeth and an infant John the Baptist to the wilderness (**4**). The painting has been damaged, but the remaining plaster shows the nimbate Elizabeth in an ochre robe, holding the small figure of the infant John, wearing a yellow and ochre tunic; both concealed within the yellow and red mountain. The pursuing soldier, to the left, is shown with a confused countenance as he looks towards where Elizabeth and John are, but he is unable to see them.[87] The two concealed figures are identifiable by the legends which name them as ⲓⲱⲁⲛⲛⲏⲥ and ⲉⲗⲓⲥⲥⲁ[ⲃⲏ]ⲑ.[88] This scene portrays the flight of Elizabeth as described in the *Protevangelium of James*, where Elizabeth cries out for help while soldiers pursue her, only to have the mountain open to conceal and protect them.[89]

The next image in the frieze is heavily damaged and therefore casts some doubt on the identity of the figures. All of the legends have been lost, except for the one above the kneeling figure, where the text ⲍⲁⲭⲁⲣ[ⲓ]ⲁⲥ is seen on the pediment of the temple (**5**).[90] The consensus seems to favour this being a scene depicting the death of Zechariah as described in the *Protevangelium of James*.[91] The scene shows two individuals separated by the corner of the wall; neither are nimbate. The standing figure who appears first in the scene to the left is depicted wearing a long tunic with half sleeves, the figure is turned slightly in towards the second figure, who kneels before a curtained, temple entrance. Some have suggested that a faded line coming from the hand of the standing figure could be identified as a sword, more evidence supporting the theory that this is a scene of the death of Zechariah.[92] The kneeling figure wears a long tunic with fitted sleeves and an unusual headpiece or hairstyle of three thick points positioned vertically on the top of the head.

The two narrative friezes show John the Baptist himself only once but depict the two most formative episodes of his life. The first is his miraculous conception which brought about his physical existence. The second the events triggered by the massacre of the innocents which led to the birth of his ascetic life in the wilderness. From what remains of the painted programs at Deir Abu Hennes, there is no evidence of a baptism scene. It is possible that it was the qualities

[87] Van Loon and Delattre, 'Cycle de l'enfance', 124.
[88] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', 49.
[89] *Protevangelium of James* 22.3.
[90] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', Pl. II.
[91] *Protevangelium of James* 23.1-3.
[92] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', 50.

represented by John's ascetic life which were the most meaningful to the audience at Abu Hennes rather than his part in the baptism.

*Chapels XVII, XXX, LI at the Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit (**6**, **7**, **8**, **9**)*

The monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit was founded between 385 and 390 by its namesake, a monk named Apollo, then abandoned sometime after the tenth century. What remains of the monastery is located on the west bank of the Nile, roughly fifteen kilometers from Dairutin, in the Hermopolite nome in Middle Egypt.[93] The monastery's name was identified by graffiti left on the monastic buildings mentioning the monastery of Apa Apollo. Details on the life of the monk Apollo are found in two literary sources, the *History of the Monks in Egypt* and the *Life of Phib*; other fragmentary documents in Coptic also mention a monastery dedicated to Apa Apollo in the Hermopolite nome. However, none of these sources provide the exact location or any mention of unique geological features which would help to locate the monastery. The monastery of Apa Apollo was part of a community of monasteries in the Hermopolite nome. These other monasteries were founded either contemporaneously with the monastery of Apa Apollo or shortly afterwards by his followers.

The earliest mention of Apa Apollo can be found in the *History of the Monks in Egypt* (ca. 400). The author writes about a monk named Apollo who was called to the ascetic life at the age of fifteen and began by withdrawing to the desert to live in isolation for forty years. Apollo eventually gathered a large following of monks, because of his reputation as a healer and performer of miracles. This following was estimated by the *History of the Monks in Egypt* to number around five hundred by the end of Apa Apollo's life. The text also mentions the changes made to the monastery over time. The monastery began as a collection of solitary hermitages at the edge of the cultivated land, up against an escarpment, and then became a larger, more centralized, communal monastic dwelling.

[93] M. Capuani, *Christian Egypt* (Collegeville, 1999) 193-6.

A second literary work which describes the foundation of the monastery of Apa Apollo was written about the life of a monk named Phib, who was said to have been a companion of Apollo in his early life. The work was purportedly written by a younger monk named Papohe, who was a member of the monastic community, and dates to the tenth century.[94] The *Life of Phib* states that Apollo started his ascetic life in the desert with a small group of monks. The group then moved further into the wilderness until Christ appeared to them and instructed them to move into some caves which could be found on a hill in an uninhabited area of desert near a village. After Phib had died and his body was interred at the monastery, a small church was built over his tomb. This first church was inevitably too small for the needs of the growing community, so Christ appeared to Apollo once more and instructed him to build a larger church, even providing the exact design. The monastery of Apollo has also been mentioned in various papyri, but since as many as five monasteries in Egypt were dedicated to him, it is difficult to ascertain which monastery is being referenced when a monastery named for Apollo is found.[95]

The existence of the ruined site of the monastery of Apa Apollo was not unknown to historians before the twentieth century. Ancient objects had been found and relocated to the Egyptian Museum, prior to any documented exploration of the site.[96] The first formal, documented exploration of the site began in 1901 and continued until 1913, the work being completed by Jean Clédat and Jean Maspero. Beginning at a large mound, the campaign discovered two churches and more than fifty buildings, identified as chapels by Clédat and halls by Maspero, all decorated with wall paintings, and graffiti. The nearby cliffs to the west of the site were also examined and were found to contain several structures on the summit which were identified as tombs.[97] The two churches were labelled as the North and South Church. Clédat identified the South Church as a sixth-century building constructed over the ruins of a fourth-century structure. Clédat dated the North Church, located in close proximity to the South Church, to the eighth century and likewise suggested that it was constructed over fourth-century foundations.[98] Clédat was not certain after his initial exploration of it if the site was used as an ancient monastery or a cemetery. Evidence

[94] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 165-200.
[95] Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 140-2.
[96] J. Clédat, 'Nouvelles recherches à Baouît (Haute-Égypte)', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 48 (1904) 517-26 at 526.
[97] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 201.
[98] Capuani, *Christian Egypt*, 193-6.

provided by graffiti at the site eventually made it evident that the site was functioning as a monastery with an adjacent cemetery.[99] After the last campaign by the Institut français d'archéologie orientale and Maspero in 1913, the monastery was left to fill once more with sand until 1976, 1984 and 1985, when some of the wall paintings found at the site were transported to the Coptic Museum in Cairo and the Louvre in Paris.[100]

In 2003, work was resumed at the site of the monastery jointly by the Institut français d'archéologie orientale and the Louvre. A site surface survey and stratigraphic excavations were conducted at the site, with small finds and samples collected for examination. The work during this campaign revealed the site to encompass roughly 40 hectares with a large central mound containing hundreds of monastic buildings, a boundary wall, a collection of tombs with an accompanying church on the cliff, as well as another area of monastic habitation to the west of the large mound where modest buildings were located as well as a *basilica*. The majority of the buildings used for habitation were constructed of mudbricks which were subsequently covered in white plaster. The excavations uncovered evidence of a multitude of specialized buildings and structures such as those used as kitchens, ovens, kilns, workshops and animal shelters. None of the excavations completed by the Institut français d'archéologie orientale and Louvre campaign revealed any structures which could be dated earlier than the sixth century. The large *basilica* found to the west of the mound shows evidence of being in use until the early tenth century. Some of the document fragments and inscriptions found at the site were dated which also bolstered the architectural evidence for the site having been in use from the sixth to the tenth century. The decoration of these buildings was not restricted to the churches but extended to almost every building at the site including the cells and their perimeter walls. The paintings located in the various chapels and halls cannot be more precisely dated than the range of sixth to ninth century, due to the lack of datable inscriptions left by the artists.[101] Narrative images of the life of John the Baptist are found in Chapels XVII (**6**), XXX (**7**, **8**) and LI (**9**), which will now be examined.

Chapel XVII is a square structure measuring roughly 4 by 4 meters with a domed roof and three niches one on each of the east, west and north walls. This chapel was documented by Clédat, he noted some damage to the wall paintings particularly to the upper parts of some of the figures.

[99] Clédat, 'Nouvelles recherches', 525-46.
[100] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 200-22.
[101] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 200-22.

The current painted program was observed to be the second layer of paintings in this chapel. The observable plaster from the first layer shows ornamental patterns; these layers are not precisely dateable. On the east wall of the chapel, we can see paintings divided by the different architectural features of the room (**6**). The vaulted ceiling of an indented apse contains a depiction of Christ in Majesty below which is Mary with the apostles. On the wall above the niche are four painted figures, some of which have legends, from left to right; the first is a bust of a female figure labelled as 'The Holy Church' and the second is the full figure of a male labelled 'Our Father Marc the Evangelist' which has suffered from loss of plaster.[102] The third and fourth figures are both male, but have no legends and have also suffered plaster loss. The figure in the third place holds a book while the fourth figure is dressed identically to Marc. To the right of these four figures is a narrative image of the baptism of Christ, which occupies what remains of the plaster on the upper portion of the wall (**6**).

Plate XLV is the only published image of this painting, taken in black and white by Clédat. The plaster has been severely damaged both above and below the narrative scene. What remains shows five figures. From left to right in the scene we have John the Baptist, a personification of the river Jordan, Christ, an unknown kneeling figure and an archangel. The scene shows John standing on the rocky bank of the river blessing Christ who stands in the river with an unknown archangel waiting on the right with a robe or cloth. At the feet of Christ, John, and the archangel are two small figures, on the left is a small, nude, nimbate female figure holding a staff who is the personification of the river Jordan. She is the smallest figure in the scene, and she looks up towards John with her hand raised with an expression of a gentle smile on her face. The second figure, kneeling to the right of Christ with his left hand on a boulder, is nude to the waist and appears to be a bystander in awe of the proceedings. The top of the scene including the top half of the figure of John and the archangel from the shoulders up are missing due to plaster loss. John and the archangel are the two largest figures of the scene. John stands barefoot and holds his robe up out of the water with his left hand; with his right he anoints the head of Christ who stands in the river. His robe lacks obvious layers or detailing, and it shapelessly covers his body from ankle to elbow in a dark, uniform colour. Opposite, the archangel wears a bi-colour, trimmed robe and stole. This implies that he wears a finer fabric, which flows and drapes delicately around the archangel's body.

[102] J. Clédat, *Le monastère et la nécropole de Baouît*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1904) 73-85 (Pl. XLV).

This scene includes a great deal of background imagery and detail. The ground of the scene is painted with the banks and water of the river Jordan; the banks are shown as rocky beneath the feet of John the Baptist but smooth and flat, with flora and fauna, around the feet of the archangel. Behind the archangel, a small water bird is shown with an unopened flower and nondescript, decorative spheres both at the bird's feet and above its head. Contrary to the religious miracle taking place in the center of the scene, the waterbird appears to be shown preening the feathers on the wings of the archangel, perhaps an intentional moment of levity in an otherwise weighty scene. Above the head of Christ are fragments from the top of the scene which is largely missing. What remains appears to be representative of Heaven's light descending with the *nomina sacra* on either side of the beams of light. The bottom of the scene is bordered by a thin, decorative band, which separates the scene of the baptism of Christ from another painting which is no longer extant.

The scenes in Chapel XXX were likewise identified by Clédat and documented with black and white photographs. The room is only accessible through either Chapel XXXI or XXXIV, not from the outdoors. Clédat believes that Chapel XXXI was used as a courtyard for Chapel XXX and that visitors would have accessed the Chapel through a long, covered corridor, which is not extant, with a doorway in the east wall. Chapel XXX itself was completely painted at one time; however, much of the plaster has degraded and only the paintings on the north and east walls remain in a condition where the programs are discernable. The west and south walls show remains of painted ornamental decorations and plant motifs, but no figural paintings. [103]

The north wall displays a painted narrative frieze above a geometrically patterned wall. Clédat identifies the three scenes of this frieze as the massacre of the innocents, the flight of Elizabeth and John (**7**), and the baptism of Christ (**8**).[104] Clédat hypothesized that the paintings were part of a larger program, depicting the life of Christ, but no evidence was found at the time of the excavation to support this conclusion. The second scene of the frieze on the north wall depicts the flight of Elizabeth and John following the massacre of the innocents, depicted in the first scene to the left. The scene shows four figures, similarly arranged to those in the flight painting at the monastery of Abu Hennes. There is a woman holding a child; the woman wears a yellow dress covered by a brown cloak and the child wears a red, spotted tunic. The woman and child are

[103] J. Clédat, *Le monastère et la nécropole de Baouît*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1916) 1-9.
[104] J. Clédat, *Le monastère et la nécropole de Baouît*, vol. 3 (Cairo, 1999) Pls. 17 and 18.

being followed by two other figures who look at each other and not towards the figures of the fleeing mother and child, as they are concealed within the mountain and hidden. The first of the two figures is very damaged and difficult to comment on beyond his position in the scene. The second figure wears a yellow tunic topped by a brown cloak and carries a baton in his left hand. No other comments on the figures or background are provided.[105]

The next image in this frieze is the depiction of the baptism of Christ,[106] which compositionally resembles the previous example from Chapel XVII. The scene consists of four figures, from left to right: John the Baptist, Christ, the personification of the river Jordan and an accompanying archangel. As with the rest of the Chapel, the scene has suffered from loss of plaster at the top of the wall and so the head of John the Baptist and the upper body of the accompanying angel are no longer extant. The photograph of the remaining painting and the watercolour reproduction of the painting were likewise both made by Clédat. As with the previous representation of this scene in Chapel XVII, the figures are not all equal in size to one another; the figures of John the Baptist and the archangel are equal in size, the figure of Christ is approximately half of their size, and the anthropomorphized figure of the river Jordan is very small and tucked into the background. John stands on the riverbanks with the toes of his sandaled feet in the water. His clothing is quite detailed: he wears a short sleeved, tan tunic which has a thick black stripe around the arms and down the front. Over this tunic, he wears a red, one shouldered, spotted cloak, very similar in texture to the garment he is shown wearing in the scene of his flight into the wilderness. John rests his right hand on the shoulder of Christ as he stands being enveloped by the water. The base of a *nimbus* can be seen just above John's left shoulder, and he must have been painted with very short hair, perhaps matching the style of Christ's, as none can be seen falling lower than his chin. The nimbed figure of Christ is the focal point of the scene; he stands completely nude and beardless with very short, dark-coloured hair. He appears as if he just stepped into the river and the river rose to cover and baptize him, with the fish and other water animals rising as well. The archangel to the right is ornately dressed wearing two layers. The underlayer is a long-sleeved tunic in blue with gold disk ornamentation and the top layer is a red patterned, fitted tunic, which is also trimmed at the bottom in gold. The angel holds out a green cloth or tunic for Christ to use. The background details of the painting are not very clear in the black and white

[105] Clédat, *Monastère et la nécropole de Baouît*, vol. 2, 3-5.
[106] Clédat, *Monastère et la nécropole de Baouît*, vol. 2, Pls. 4 and 5.

photograph, but in the watercolour replication by Clédat, the scenery appears verdant and lush with desert hills in the distance behind John. The water surrounding Christ is very dark, almost black, and is filled with fish. The anthropomorphized male figure of the river Jordan is completely nude and seems to be holding a ceramic jug upside down, pouring out the source of the river's water.

Finally, Chapel LI contains a representation, again identified by Clédat, of the visitation within a Marian cycle which depicts the annunciation to Mary, the voyage to Bethlehem and the nativity. Chapel LI is located to the southwest of the South Church and is described as being thoroughly painted, although the paintings have suffered damage.[107] The visitation is the second scene of the frieze on the north wall, with the annunciation to its left and the voyage to Bethlehem to the right (**9**). The painting was photographed by Clédat in black and white, and so no observations can be made as to the colours used. The painting depicts Mary and Elizabeth, identifiable by a legend, in an embrace with a tall floral motif to the left and an ornate door to the right. Both Mary and Elizabeth are shown nimbate; Elizabeth, the figure on the right, is shown with her left hand on Mary's shoulder as she leans forward to kiss her cheek. Mary returns the embrace by placing her right hand on Elizabeth's arm. Both figures wear long-sleeved robes with cloaks which cover their heads, but their vestments are not identically coloured. Interestingly, even through her heavy robes, Elizabeth is depicted visibly pregnant. The two figures share a close embrace, which follows the events as described by the *Protevangelium of James*.[108]

*Church of Macarius, Monastery of Macarius, Wadi el-Natrun (**10**)*

Macarius the Great, also known as Macarius the Egyptian, is the traditional founder of the monastery of Macarius and the father of monastic life in the Wadi el-Natrun, which is located midway between Cairo and Alexandria.[109] The area of *Scetis* or Wadi el-Natrun is home to numerous monasteries which were founded beginning in the fourth century. The four principal monasteries, the monastery of the Romans (Deir el-Baramus), the monastery of Macarius, the

[107] Clédat, *Monastère et la nécropole de Baouît*, vol. 3, 109-32 (Figs. 110 and 111).
[108] *Protevangelium of James* 12.2.
[109] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 154.

monastery of Bishoi, and the monastery of John the Little are all said to have been founded by Macarius or one of his followers. The Wadi el-Natrun became a multicultural monastic community of many monasteries and hermitages with monks coming from as far away as Ethiopia, Syria, Armenia, and the West.[110] Literary sources including the Coptic *Life of Macarius of Scetis*, indicate that Macarius chose Wadi el-Natrun as the location for his solitary life as an ascetic because of a dream in which he was visited by a cherub.[111] Macarius is said to have used two monastic buildings early during his monastic life: an original cave hermitage in 330 and then, in around 360, he went on to settle in a new cell which could accommodate himself as well as two disciples. Macarius lived until around 390 and at the time of his death, the only buildings recorded as having been built were a few cells and the first church of Macarius.[112] More disciples quickly followed Macarius into the desert and the needs of this new community resulted in the building of refectories, wells and larger residences in the fifth century.[113] These monks practised a semi-hermitic form of monasticism where the individuals would worship independently throughout the week and then assemble once weekly at their communal church. However, not all monks lived in complete isolation; there existed an established form of mentorship amongst the monks, where an experienced monk would teach the novice monks how to survive and worship in the desert.[114] This practice of semi-hermitic monasticism continued in Wadi el-Natrun until the mid-fifteenth century when declining monk numbers meant that the unfortified hermitages had to be finally abandoned and the monastery of Macarius became a completely coenobitic monastery.[115]

The monastery underwent many phases of destruction, rebuilding, and improvement because of frequent raiding by nomads in the fifth and ninth centuries.[116] These raids became so destructive that the monks of the monastery of Macarius were ordered in the late ninth century, by the Patriarch Shenuda I, to fortify their central infrastructure, such as their churches, some cells, and refectories, behind walls. Many of the other monasteries in the region followed suit and as a result are still largely operational today.[117] The monastery of Macarius became an important center

[110] Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 23.
[111] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 152.
[112] H.G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of the Wâdi 'n Natrûn*, vol. 3 (New York, 1933) 31-2.
[113] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 151-3.
[114] Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 21.
[115] Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, vol. 2, 393-410.
[116] Evelyn White, *Monasteries* vol. 3, 31-129.
[117] P. Grossmann, 'On the Architecture at Wādī al-Natrūn', in M. Mikhail, M. Moussa (eds), *Christianity and Monasticism in Wadi el-Natrun* (Cairo, 2009) 159-84.

for the Egyptian Church starting in the sixth century when it became the temporary home of the patriarch of Alexandria until the seventh century. This high standing is further evidenced by the considerable number of manuscripts which are in the possession of the monastery and also from the role the monastery had in both the investiture ceremony of new patriarchs and the celebration of Easter by the patriarch. Furthermore, from the sixth to the twelfth century the majority of the patriarchs of Alexandria were chosen from the monks at the monastery of Macarius.[118] The monastery of Macarius as it stands today is the second monastery of Macarius to have been built in the environs of the original cell of Macarius the Great. The first monastic site contained buildings which were described in the fifth century as including a church, a well and a fortification tower known as the tower of Piamoun. The monastery of Macarius was moved from its original location to where it stands in the present day some time between the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh century, when the new church of Macarius was consecrated by Patriarch Benjamin I.[119]

Archaeological documentation of the monastery began in the early nineteenth century when the site was marked as 'ruins' by the Napoleonic surveyors.[120] However it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that the site underwent more formal examinations by Evelyn White for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. During the project the monastic sites of the Wadi el-Natrun were mapped and sketched, and the results were published in a three-volume work between 1926 and 1933. Part of the study undertaken by Evelyn White on the history of the site of Wadi el-Natrun was conducted through the examinations of written sources such as monastic literature. These texts have provided information on the periods of decline and restoration of the monastery buildings. As a result, three main phases of renewal have been identified prior to the eleventh century. The first of these three phases of building and decoration began with the original construction and decor completed between 645 and 647. A second period of renewal in around 790 occurred for the translation of the relics of John the Baptist from Alexandria to the church of Macarius. Finally, extensive building in around 830 followed in response to destruction caused by a raid in 817. Further excavation was undertaken in 1976, spurred by discoveries made during

[118] K. Innemée, 'The Monastery of St. Macarius: Survey and Documentation Work 2009-2012', *Eastern Christian Art* 10 (2014) 21-32.
[119] Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, vol. 3, 31-129.
[120] Innemée, 'Monastery of St. Macarius', 24.

renovations to the floor begun in 1969. During the course of these excavations the relics of John the Baptist and Elisha were rediscovered within a vault inside the northern wall of the church.[121]

In 2007 a preliminary survey was conducted outside of the walls of the monastery. Based on this survey, permission was granted by the Supreme Council of Antiquities for more comprehensive documentation of the structures found around the monastery with a focus on the areas threatened by the encroaching agricultural activities. This documentation was completed from 2009 to 2010 and resulted in the completion of a map of two square kilometers of the area surrounding the monastery and the recording of one hundred and sixty man-made structures dating from the fifth to seventh centuries.[122] There are acknowledged issues and *lacunae* in our knowledge of the history surrounding the monastery of Macarius and the monasteries of Wadi el-Natrun because the established history has been constructed largely based on various textual sources.[123] The main issue with these texts is the question of their veracity; they are accounts from fourth and early fifth century monastics which have come down to the authors by word of mouth, sometimes centuries later.[124] However, great strides have been made in the recording and surveying of monastic sites archaeologically which is building up a body of knowledge for more in-depth, and less tendentious, study.

The current church of Macarius is composed of three domed sanctuaries and a double vaulted nave. The three sanctuaries are known as the sanctuary of John the Baptist (sometimes referred to as the sanctuary of Mark), the sanctuary of Benjamin and the little sanctuary; the walls of these sanctuaries are the oldest architectural features in the monastery, dating to the seventh century.[125] Paintings can be found in two of these sanctuaries along with some decoration in the nave and *khurus* which date from multiple phases of painting, from the ninth to the early twelfth century.[126] All of the painted programs are very damaged and have suffered severe loss of plaster resulting in few extant paintings. However, from the remaining plaster we can distinguish three

[121] L.-A. Hunt, 'Art in the Wadi el-Natrun: An Assessment of the Earliest Wall paintings in the Church of Abu Makar, Dayr Abu Makar', in Mikhail, Moussa, *Monasticism in Wadi el-Natrun*, 211-45 at 219.
[122] Innemée, 'Monastery of St. Macarius', 21.
[123] Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, vol. 2, 60-124.
[124] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 150-51.
[125] Hunt, 'Art in the Wadi el-Natrun', 217.
[126] G. van Loon and M. Immerzeel, 'Inventory of Coptic Wall-Paintings Part One: Wall-Paintings in Monasteries and Churches', in M. Immerzeel, K. Innemée, L. Mols, L. Van Rompay (eds), *Essays on Christian Art and Culture in the Middle East*, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1998) 6-55 at 18-9.

paintings concerning John the Baptist which span three different composition types: one from the *deesis* group, one from the individual depictions group, and two from the narrative group. The *deesis* painting and individual depiction will be described in Chapters 2 and 3, will now turn to the narrative images.

The sanctuary of John the Baptist is the northern sanctuary in the church of Macarius, which contains a painted program dating to the Fatimid period, 909-1171.[127] This sanctuary is octagonal in shape and displays paintings featuring Old and New Testament scenes. The central image on the eastern wall is a *deesis* with a central Christ. To the right of this composition is a pointed niche, crowned by a narrative painting depicting the annunciation to Zechariah by the Archangel Gabriel. At one time there existed a painting within the apse of the pointed niche but the plaster has completely fallen, leaving only the bare brick. To the left of the central *deesis* scene is another pointed niche showing the nativity and crowned by a narrative painting of the annunciation to Mary by the Archangel Gabriel.[128] The imagery surrounding the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist follows the series of events as outlined in the gospel of Luke: Zechariah, while working in the temple and burning incense at the altar, is visited by the Archangel Gabriel.[129] Gabriel informs him that he will conceive a child with his wife Elizabeth despite their advanced age because God has blessed them, and that the child will be 'great in the sight of the Lord' and will be named John.[130] It is this portion of the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist that is illustrated in the sanctuary of John the Baptist (**10**). A second narrative scene depicting of the baptism of Christ is mentioned in a report on the wall paintings of the church of Macarius, but the deterioration of the painting and lack of verifiable information on the painting renders its inclusion in this work impossible at the present time.[131]

The painting of the annunciation to Zechariah shows him on the right of the niche point; he stands on the altar steps cradling a box in his left hand and spreading incense with a censer in his right hand. The steps follow the slope of the niche up to an image of the altar. Zechariah is

[127] Capuani, *Christian Egypt*, 88.
[128] Van Loon and Immerzeel, 'Coptic Wall-Paintings', 18-22.
[129] Luke 1:5-24.
[130] Luke 1:13-15.
[131] Mentioned in Van Loon and Immerzeel, 'Coptic Wall-Paintings', 18. All that is known is that the painting was a mural on the south-west wall of the sanctuary of John the Baptist, identified as a depiction of the baptism of Christ. In the apse below the baptism was a depiction of Job and his friends on a hill.

depicted nimbate wearing a complicated garment of numerous layers. There appear to be four layers in total, the bottom-most being a robe of brown, on top of which sits an apron or skirt of pale blue, on top of which there is a vest (perhaps leather) with short skirt of brown, and finally we have a long light blue cloak with a collar. It is unclear whether the long brown sleeves beneath the blue cloak belong to the bottom-most layer or the brown vest as they appear to be the same colour. Zechariah is shown as an old man, with a long grey beard and hair, both of which are presented neatly coiffed. On the left side of the point is the Archangel Gabriel who is shown winged and nimbate with his right hand raised towards Zechariah and the left holding a staff. Gabriel is barefoot and wears a blue robe beneath a long sleeved light red cloak. Between the two figures at almost the apex of the niche arch is a large sphere, perhaps representing the moon. In the opposite painting, of the annunciation to Mary, a similar spherical motif is shown representing the sun.

*Church of the Holy Virgin, Deir el-Baramus, Wadi el-Natrun (**11**, **12**)*

Deir el-Baramus has numerous foundation traditions, the most widespread being that the titular Romans were Maximus and Domitius, children of the Emperor Valentinian I (364-375). These two Romans are said to have come to the region of Scetis to live an ascetic life as followers of Macarius the Great. After their premature death, Macarius orders the building of a church in their memory which became a focal point for the semi-hermitic monastic settlement which grew around it.[132] The Deir el-Baramus which currently stands was founded as the counterpart monastery to the original monastic community. It was built at the end of the sixth century by the supporters of Severus, the Bishop of Antioch in front of the first Deir el-Baramus founded by Macarius in the fourth century, which no longer stands.[133] The need for a counterpart monastery came about as a reaction to a theological dispute between Severus and the Bishop of Halicarnassus, Julian, over the corruptibility of Christ before the resurrection. The dispute resulted in a rupture in the Egyptian

[132] M. Zibawi, *Images de l'Égypte chrétienne* (Paris, 2003) 142.
[133] K. Innemée, 'Excavations at Deir al-Baramus 2002-2005', *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 44 (2005) 55-68.

church and the need to separate the followers of Severus and resulting in the construction of a duplicate monastery in the Wadi el-Natrun.[134]

The early history of Deir el-Baramus shares many similarities with the monastery of Macarius, as previously described, and the other monasteries of the Wadi el-Natrun. Both monasteries were said to have been founded in the fourth century, both started as semi-hermitic monastic institutions and were subject to raids and eventual fortification as a result. When the 'new' Deir el-Baramus was built in the sixth century, it was constructed with a keep to serve as a place of refuge during these raids which was ultimately not sufficient. Walls were then built, and the monastery eventually fully transitioned to a coenobitic organization in the ninth century.[135] The original Deir el-Baramus underwent archaeological excavation from 1994 to 2013 by the University of Leiden under K. C. Innemée. This monastic site was originally misidentified as the monastery of Moses the Black which was later located north of Deir el-Baramus.[136] The church of the Virgin of Baramus at the extant Deir el-Baramus is the oldest church of the Wadi el-Natrun monasteries, dating to the late sixth or early seventh century, and is decorated with many paintings including part of a Christological cycle dated to the medieval period, featuring two scenes concerning John the Baptist.[137] The church underwent several periods of renovation in Late Antiquity and the medieval period. A *khurus* was added in the eighth or ninth century and changes were made to the dome in the central *haykal* in the thirteenth century. There is also evidence of remodelling in the central nave area which has been dated to the thirteenth century. The paintings of the nave, including the Christological cycle, are preserved on the first layer of plaster on the inside transepts which separate the central aisle from the north and south aisles of the nave. This makes the late twelfth to early thirteenth century the most likely date to assign to these paintings.

During renovations of the church floor, the opportunity was taken to examine the church's foundations. The findings have provided evidence for the dating from between the late sixth to very early seventh century. The original church floor plan was given a *terminus ante quem* of before the mid-seventh century due to the lack of a *khurus*. The paintings in the church were discovered in 1986 during refurbishments which led to three campaigns from 1988 to 1990 by the

[134] Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 22-4.
[135] S. Pasi, 'I dipinti della chiesa di Al-Adra nel monastero di Deir-el-Baramus (Wadi-el-Natrun)', *Zograf* 34 (2010) 37-52.
[136] Grossmann, 'Architecture at Wādī al-Natrūn', 170-1.
[137] Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 22-4.

Institut français d'archéologie orientale to uncover, restore, and document them.[138] These paintings can be attributed to three phases of painting; the paintings outside of the central *haykal* and the painting of an archangel in the nave are the oldest extant in the church, dating to around 1200. The paintings in the nave, upper left part of the eastern central sanctuary wall, and the southern sanctuary date to this phase as well.[139] Lastly, the paintings found in the central nave on the south wall of the nave transept which make up the Christological cycle also date to the late twelfth to early thirteenth century, as previously mentioned. This frieze is composed of the annunciation, the visitation, the nativity, the baptism of Christ, an unknown scene with two jars on a table, perhaps the wedding at Cana, and finally Christ's entry into Jerusalem.[140] The plaster of this painted cycle has been damaged; there are many areas where the painted plaster has completely fallen down and this has greatly affected the examination and full comprehension of some of the scenes.

The scene of the visitation in the church of the Holy Virgin is the second scene in the Christological cycle of the southern transept of the nave (**11**). The narrative painting shows the two nimbate women in a close embrace; Mary is on the viewer's left and Elizabeth is to the right. The women can be differentiated by their clothing: Mary wears the same blue tunic with a light red cloak which covers her head that she wears in the previous scene of the annunciation. Elizabeth is shown wearing a yellow tunic with a dark brown cloak which also covers her head. The scene is one of movement. The two women are stepping into an embrace; both women have their arms wrapped high around each other's shoulders. Elizabeth with her head tilted upwards, kisses Mary on the cheek. There is much deterioration to the faces of the two women. Therefore, no comments can be made as to their facial expressions. The narrative scene is shown against a plain background of pale yellow with a thin band of red at the top. This depiction of the visitation at the church of the Holy Virgin is representative of the description provided in the *Protevangelium of James*, as this text describes the women as embracing, not greeting each other solely with words.[141]

Also part of this frieze is a scene of the baptism of Christ (**12**). This narrative scene is the fourth in the frieze, between the scenes of the nativity and the unknown scene, hypothesized to be the wedding at Cana.[142] This scene has also suffered greatly due to loss of plaster, more so than

[138] Pasi, 'Dipinti della Chiesa', 40-50.
[139] Van Loon and Immerzeel, 'Coptic Wall-Paintings', 10.
[140] Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 27.
[141] *Protevangelium of James*, 12.2.
[142] Pasi, 'Dipinti della Chiesa', 47.

the scene of the visitation, and the figure of Christ has mostly deteriorated; however, John the Baptist has been spared much of this damage. The baptism scene is composed of four figures: from left to right we have John, Christ and at least two angles. Christ is the central image; from what remains we can see that he has a cross *nimbus*, medium-length brown hair and beard with his shoulders and upper chest bare. His face and the rest of his body are no longer extant. The angels on the right are shown with plain *nimbi* and are beardless with short hair, one with black and one with brown hair, wearing what appear to be red cloaks over white tunics. Both look on at the baptism with neutral expressions. The figure of John is the most intact in this scene. He wears a light blue robe over what appears to be a dark brown tunic. His dark brown hair and beard are long and unkempt, and he is turned towards Christ with his hands placed on his shoulders while water pours over them. What remains of the background, like that of the visitation, is quite plain; all of the figures are shown against a yellow toned background with a thin red band at the top. Curiously, John is shown with a red and white *nimbus*, where a small white *nimbus* appears behind his head but does not rise above the top and another large, dark red *nimbus* appears behind and above the white one. This phenomenon may be an illusion caused by the deterioration of the plaster though it does appear intentionally done.

Despite the damage to the painting, the scene of the baptism of Christ follows the event as described in the New Testaments gospels, as well as the gospel of John and the *Life* of John the Baptist.[143] The main divergence is the absence of the dove representing the Holy Spirit, present in all written accounts but missing in this scene; perhaps the presence of the angels replaces the dove as representatives of Heaven, or the dove has been lost in the deterioration of the painted plaster.

*Cave Church of Paul the Hermit, Monastery of Paul, Eastern Desert (**13**)*

The last painting to be covered in this chapter can be found at the monastery of Paul. This monastery was traditionally founded around the site of the cave hermitage of Paul of Thebes, as memorialized by Jerome in his fourth century work, *Life of Paul of Thebes*. The *Life* describes

[143] Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-10, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-33 and *Life of John the Baptist*.

Paul as the first monk to 'inhabit the desert'.[144] According to Jerome, Paul was a wealthy, educated youth who sought a life of extreme seclusion during the reigns of Decius (249-251) and Valerian (253-260). Fleeing persecution, Paul walked into the desert and found a cave supplied by a clear stream and shaded by palm trees. There, Paul spends one hundred and thirteen years in complete solitude; he wears palm fronds and eats palm fruit which is supplemented by bread supplied daily by a raven. After his death he is buried by Antony in an unmarked grave dug by two lions in the desert.[145] The cave which the monastery of Paul centers around is a natural cave in the escarpment of the South Galala Plateau located in the eastern desert, near the Red Sea. The nearby monastery of Antony is located on the opposite side of this Plateau, accessible by either walking through the desert and around the peak of the plateau or by climbing up the steep escarpment and crossing the top of the plateau.[146]

It is likely that this monastery began as a semi-hermitic community in Late Antiquity, perhaps supported by the nearby monastery of Antony. The earliest monastic structures which can be certainly dated are the addition of the *haykal* of Paul, the shrine of Paul and the main nave within the cave church, which date to the thirteenth century. These rock-cut rooms at one time were only accessible through the sanctuary of Antony; that doorway was sealed at an unknown date and is no longer extant. At the end of the fourteenth century the site was said to house sixty monks, but this number decreased further at the end of the fifteenth century when the monastery was sacked by raiders. In the early sixteenth century the Patriarch Gabriel VII saw to the repopulation of the monastery, but further raids and a continued waning of the monk population resulted in the abandonment of the site in the seventeenth century. After the abandonment of the monastery, the site was used as a camp by travellers and damage was done to the paintings. The eighteenth century saw the monastery reconstructed and repopulated once again this time by the Patriarch John XVI. As a part of this renovation, the church of Mercurius and the church of the Archangel Michel were built, and the cave church of Paul received three new rooms as well as new paintings added to the existing painted program.[147]

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[144] Jerome, *Life of Paul*, 1.
[145] Jerome, *Life of Paul*, 1-16.
[146] E. Bolman, 'The Medieval Paintings in the Cave Church: Phase One', in W. Lyster (ed.), *The Cave Church of Paul the Hermit at the Monastery of St. Paul, Egypt* (New Haven and London, 2008) 163-78 at 172.
[147] M. Swanson, 'The Monastery of St. Paul in Historical Context', in Lyster, *Cave Church of Paul the Hermit*, 43-60.

Despite its isolation, the site was a pilgrimage destination in Late Antiquity, with attestation for visits to the site as early as 401.[148] The monastery remained a remote destination but was continually visited by pilgrims until 1946 when a road from Suez to the monastery was completed, making travel to the monastery of Paul a journey of only six hours by road from Cairo.[149] The first archaeological expedition at the monastery took place in 1930-31 led by Whittemore. During this project, photographs of the paintings and surrounding monastery were taken which documented the water damage in the cave church. Photographs were also taken of the concrete repairs, installed to mitigate further water damage in the cave church, that covered some of the paintings. In 1985 a team from the Institut français d'archéologie oriental, led by Paul van Moorsel, documented the paintings and inscriptions in the cave church. Through this documentation it was determined that there were at least two phases of paintings in the cave church.[150]

In 1997-1999 an American Research Center in Egypt project, led by Michael Jones, completed additional documentation and began the conservation of the paintings. During this process, the concrete repairs, on the floor and lower walls, were removed and proper water drainage was added to finally remediate the long-standing water issue. This restoration confirmed the presence of three layers of paintings which were dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century, the late thirteenth century, and the eighteenth century.[151] The painted program of the cave church is a mix of mostly individual depictions of holy persons with a single narrative frieze. The narrative frieze begins in the sanctuary of Antony and terminates in the Nave above the entrance to this sanctuary.[152] It is in this narrative frieze where an extant painting of John the Baptist is found.

This narrative frieze was completed in two phases of painting. The portion of the frieze in the sanctuary of Antony shows the annunciation to Mary on the east wall, beneath an image of Christ in Majesty which both date to 1232-3.[153] The second part of the frieze is found in the nave above the entrance to the sanctuary of Antony. This second part proceeds from the annunciation to

[148] Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 112-18.
[149] Bolman, 'Medieval Paintings in the Cave Church: Phase One', 172.
[150] W. Lyster, 'Introduction: The Monastery of St. Paul the Hermit', in Lyster, *Cave Church of Paul the Hermit*, 1-21.
[151] P. Sheehan, 'New Archaeological Evidence for the Architectural Development of the Cave Church', in Lyster, *Cave Church of Paul the Hermit*, 109-26.
[152] M. Jones, 'The Conservation of the Mill Building, Refectory, and Cave Church', Lyster, *Cave Church of Paul the Hermit*, 127-42 at 134.
[153] Bolman, 'Medieval Paintings in the Cave Church: Phase One', 163-78.

Mary but in reverse, from right to left. The four episodes depicted are: a damaged scene suggested to be the nativity, the three magi visiting Herod, the massacre of the innocents and finally an angel carrying an infant John the Baptist on the ceiling above the preceding scene (**13**). This part of the frieze was added in 1291-2 and has suffered a great deal of damage; the events being portrayed are identifiable by the legends found at the top of the frieze. The best-preserved painting in the frieze is of the angel carrying the infant John above the massacre of the innocents. This painting is not identified in the legend but shows a dark-haired angel, nimbate and dressed in a light blue tunic with a red cloak and golden wings. The angel holds an infant close, up against his chest and face as he flies to the right, over the massacre painted in the preceding scene. The infant has short dark hair and is nimbate wearing a yellow tunic and an ochre cloak. Both figures are shown against a blue background which is the same colour as the angel's tunic.

This scene does not contain a legend, but, it was posited by Van Moorsel that this was a painting of the Archangel Uriel carrying John the Baptist.[154] Given the sequence of the narrative frieze beginning with the annunciation to Mary and ending with the massacre of the innocents, the identification of this infant as John the Baptist does align in spirit with the description of events as described by the *Life* of John the Baptist. In the *Life*, John is provided for and protected by angels as he grows up alone in the wilderness, after the massacre of the innocents and the passing of his mother. While there is no description in the *Life* of John the Baptist of an angel carrying John away from the massacre, he and his mother were protected by them during their time in hiding.[155]

Conclusion

The thirteen narrative images painted from the narrative stories of the life of John the Baptist reviewed in this chapter provide excellent examples of the preferred themes and styles used to illustrate these written narratives. Scenes from the early life of John through to the baptism of Christ are found in four monastic settings, all but two of which are represented in a series or frieze (**1**, **2**, **3**, **4**, **5**, **7**, **8**, **9**, **11**, **12**, **13**). The number of samples of paintings for analysis is limited, but

[154] E. Bolman, 'The Medieval Paintings in the Cave Church, Phase Two: Tradition and Transformation', in Lyster, *Cave Church of Paul the Hermit*, 179-207.
[155] *Life of John the Baptist,* pp. 239-44 Mingana.

some observations can be made regarding the attributes and wardrobe of John, potential textual sources used as inspiration for the paintings, and which narrative scenes were the most meaningful as well as which were the least. Given the popularity of the depictions of the baptism of Christ throughout the Christian East and West, the three paintings of the baptism we see in Egyptian monastic art can also be compared iconographically to those from Eastern and Western art.

As previously mentioned, many of the scenes reviewed in this chapter do not feature John the Baptist, rather, the narrative scenes feature his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth as well as the Archangel Gabriel, Mary and soldiers. It is from the three scenes of the baptism of Christ that we can make some observations on the iconography used to depict the adult John the Baptist (**6**, **8**, **12**). Moreover, the three paintings of the flight of John provide us with examples of the iconography used to depict John as an infant (**4**, **7**, **13**). The oldest two scenes of the baptism in Chapels XVII and XXX at the monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit have damage to the paintings, including the loss of the heads and upper torso of the figures of John the Baptist. However, the clothing remains relatively intact. From the images recorded by Clédat, we can see that in Chapel XVII (**6**) John is wearing a heavy, voluminous, dark robe and is barefoot, while in Chapel XXX (**8**) he wears two layers, one plain tunic and a cloak of spotted ochre material as well as sandals. In the latest image of the Baptism (**12**), at the church of the Holy Virgin in Deir el-Baramus, we have the most complete image of John. We see the almost full figure of John with his dark beard and hair styled long and unkempt, wearing a pale blue cloak over a brown tunic. The wardrobe of John the Baptist as described by Matthew and Mark state only that he wore '… clothing made from camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist…',[156]. The *Life* of John the Baptist states that the origins of this wardrobe are angelic in nature, having been delivered to Zechariah in the temple before the flight of John and Elizabeth into the wilderness. The description of the clothing from the *Vita* is that it came from Elijah and the leather belt from Elisha.[157] Both of these descriptions would have allowed the Late Antique and medieval monastic artists a great deal of freedom when assigning attributes to John the Baptist, which they took full advantage of when depicting him. Missing from all of the examples is the leather belt from the New Testament description. The scenes of the Baptism also do not have any visible legends to guide the viewers; perhaps it was felt that this iconic scene did not need any extra identification.

[156] Matthew 3:4 and Mark 1:6.
[157] *Life of John the Baptist*, pp. 239 Mingana.

The friezes depicting the conception of John the Baptist such as those scenes including Zechariah and Elizabeth, independent of Marian or Christological cycles, are more prevalent in the monastic art dated to the Late Antique period (**1**, **2**, **3**, **4**, **5**, **7**, **9**). This trend of displaying the early life of John the Baptist as described by the New Testament and the *Protevangelium of James* seems to have lessened in the medieval period based on the extant examples except at the monastery of Paul, if it is indeed a painting of John the Baptist. The latest narrative paintings of John the Baptist dealt more with his namesake role as baptizer in the Christological cycle and the role of his mother Elizabeth in the visitation as part of a Marian cycle. The scenes surrounding the conception and early life of John the Baptist, unlike the baptism, have accompanying legends; either because these scenes were not as familiar to the Late Antique viewers and required explanation, or, because they were likely to be misidentified as scenes from the early life of Christ. Interestingly, not all scenes from the literary life of John the Baptist are represented as narrative scenes in the extant monastic art. The scenes of John's conception, the death of his father, his early life in the wilderness and his role as baptizer are well represented in the art, but no painting has been found thus far that shows the imprisonment or death of John the Baptist. In contrast, the death of Zechariah is represented as part of the massacre of the innocents and flight of Elizabeth frieze at the quarry monastery of Abu Hennes, though the depiction is of the moment before his death and not of the actual act, which differs from later medieval and Renaissance works which do not have any qualms about showing the moment of death.

The most popular narrative scene from the life of John the Baptist is, unsurprisingly, the baptism of Christ with four known depictions at the monasteries covered in this work (**6**, **8**, **12**). This popularity is followed closely by scenes from the early life and conception of John the Baptist; the annunciation to Zechariah (**1**, **10**) and the visitation (**9**, **11**), both appearing twice each. The flight of Elizabeth and John into the wilderness appears in three paintings (**4**, **7**, **13**). The representations which only occur once each, are the scenes of Zechariah made speechless, Zechariah's subsequent meeting with Elizabeth, and the death of Zechariah (**2**, **3**, **5**). The compositions of the baptism of Christ show a mix of Eastern and Western iconographic styles. Depictions of the baptism found in the art of the East are described as frequently including angels and a fleeing personification of the river Jordan while Christ is shown as a youth with Heaven's light descending upon him as a dove, sometimes with the hand of God. Western baptism scenes are frequently shown with the personification of the river Jordan holding a jug or some reeds, not

fleeing but admiring the scene, Heaven's light is shown with a dove over Christ as a nude youth with John standing on a rocky riverbank, sometimes dressed in a philosopher's cloak.[158]

When looking at the extant examples of the baptism at the monastery of Apollo at Bawit and the later example at Deir el-Baramus at Wadi el-Natrun we see a mix of the elements from the East and West. The two examples from the monastery of Apollo show a youthful, nude Christ beneath what appears to be beams of light from Heaven; however, much of this upper plaster is lost. John the Baptist is shown standing on a rocky bank with his hands blessing Christ. The personification of the river Jordan is shown in two ways, one pouring the river water from a jug and the second holding reeds and smiling at the procession; both scenes are also attended by angels, who hold garments for Christ. The later example from Deir el-Baramus shows a bearded, adult Christ attended by angels with John dressed in a light cloak over a heavy robe and shows all figures roughly equal size in the scene. Here much of the background is lost and so no room was left for the light of Heaven or dove if the artist had wanted to include it.

The scenes of the visitation, despite the large gap in time between their completions, show a preference for the events as described in the *Protevangelium of James* and not the New Testament. In the New Testament the women are not described as embracing. Rather it is the voice of Mary which causes the in-utero John to stir and fill his mother with the Holy Spirit. However, in the *Protevangelium of James*, Elizabeth blesses Mary with an embrace and that is when she feels John stir within her and recognize Mary as the mother of the son of God.[159] As we have seen, the monastic painters heavily relied upon the *Protevangelium of James* for many of these scenes, in particular the conception and early life of John the Baptist, since they are not described in the New Testament. The *Protevangelium of James* was condemned by Jerome and eventually Pope Innocent I in 405.[160] Yet, based on how often it influences the art of monasticism in later centuries, it could be inferred that this text remained well-known and circulated amongst monastic artists and patrons despite the fifth century ban.

[158] G. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (Greenwich, 1966) 127-43.
[159] *Protevangelium of James* 12.2.
[160] Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 32.

Chapter 2
Deesis Paintings with John the Baptist

The word *deesis*, δέησις in Greek, literally translates as 'petition' and is used to describe a particular triadic composition of figures used in Christian art. These paintings act as a liturgical device by which the petitioner provides their prayers to the represented individuals so that these prayers are directly transmitted to God by the intercessors. The modern use of the word *deesis* to mean an artistic composition where specifically Mary and John the Baptist are shown praying to Christ on behalf of petitioners and humanity in general, as a technical term, was not used by Late Antique patrons and artists. The term first began to be used in this way by modern art historians to describe the presence of petitioners on behalf of the faithful in Christian art.[161] The recommendation for worshipers to use a holy intercessor for prayers was introduced into official Church doctrine during the second council of Nicaea in 787.[162] The practice was modeled after the process of using intercessors to petition Roman officials, including the emperor, throughout Antiquity.[163] The oldest written description of a *deesis* depiction, mentioning specifically Mary and John the Baptist, is found in the mid-seventh century *Miracles of Saints Cyrus and John* by Sophronius and was a popular subject in the art and literature of Late Antiquity.[164] Outside of Egypt, many of the artistic *deesis* representations are found on portable objects and mosaics, not wall paintings, but the climate of Egypt has provided the perfect environment for their preservation.[165]

Comprehensive studies of the *deesis* paintings of Egypt have not yet been published, but the *deesis* theme, as an important composition in Byzantine art, has been covered in numerous studies.[166] The earliest extant mosaic depicting a *deesis* composition in the East can be found in the monastery of Catherine at Mt. Sinai. The monastery was founded in the sixth century and

[161] A. Cutler, 'Under the Sign of the Deesis: On the Questions of Representativeness in Medieval Art and Literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987) 145-54.
[162] N. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (London, 1990) 131-56.
[163] C. Walter, 'Two Notes on the Deesis', *Revue des études byzantines* 26 (1968) 311-36.
[164] Cutler, 'Under the Sign of the Deesis', 151.
[165] Walter, 'Two Notes on the Deesis', 333.
[166] Walter, 'Two Notes on the Deesis', 311-36 and 'Further Notes on the Deesis', *Revue des études byzantines* 28 (1970) 161-87 and Cutler, 'Under the Sign of the Deesis' contain summaries of the studies completed on the *deesis* theme outside of Egypt.

features a *deesis* composition with Christ represented as the lamb of God with Mary and John the Baptist shown as busts in medallions on either side.[167] In the West, the earliest known, extant wall painting of a *deesis* composition can be found in Rome in the church of Santa Maria Antiqua. The church was founded in the late sixth century using an existing first-century structure found at the base of the Palatine hill. The *deesis* painting in this church can be dated to the seventh century and, through chance preservation due to a landslide in the ninth century, did not receive any later additions or refurbishment to its painted program, thus preserving the earlier *deesis* painting.[168] For the East, the *deesis* composition which has received the most attention has been the *deesis* mosaic in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. This mosaic was installed in 1261 and postdates the *deesis* paintings included in this study.[169] The *deesis* theme was used in other mediums as well, such as in illustrated manuscripts, on textiles, wooden painted icons, and chancel screens. which date to as late as the eighteenth century and continues to be a popular iconographic motif in modern Christian art.[170]

The specific definition associated with the *deesis* composition has been the subject of some debate. There are two main groups of thought. The first is that the *deesis* composition is one of prayer and intercession on behalf of the petitioners, which first developed at the end of the Iconoclastic Period in the ninth century; this would imply that any earlier *deesis* paintings are not intercessory paintings. The second is that these compositions depict a scene from Judgement Day, where a celestial court, with the most significant witnesses of Christ's divinity given places of prominence, will judge souls.[171] John the Baptist and Mary are both associated with Judgement Day, John the Baptist as the forerunner of Christ, foretelling his sacrifice, and Mary through her role as Christ's first prophet, but not all *deesis* compositions feature only these two persons.[172] Some scholars even question the principle of attempting to label the *deesis* theme, when the corpus of material available to achieve a thorough analysis exists solely as a manifestation of chance preservation. Given the variability in the genre, any attempts at creating a firm definition would run the risk of lessening the value of the works labelled as divergent from what becomes defined

[167] R. Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford, 2018) 44-5.
[168] M. Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome* (Brighton and Portland, 2001) 112-29.
[169] K. Vapheiades, 'Reassessing a Late Byzantine masterpiece: The Deesis mosaic in the Hagia Sophia of Constantinople', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 45 (2021) 166-83.
[170] Walter, 'Two Notes on the Deesis', 311.
[171] For a summary of the debates, see Walter, 'Two Notes on the Deesis', 312.
[172] Walter, 'Two Notes on the Deesis', 322-9.

as the 'correct' form.[173] In some cases, the *deesis* is narrowly defined as a composition consisting of only John the Baptist and Mary with a central Christ.[174] However, the current attitude towards the study of classical and medieval art is to resist reliance on the extant corpus of art as sole evidence to define genres, as this tends to generalize and can lead to a narrow view on the subject.[175] Whatever the meaning (if solely one) to the Late Antique and medieval audiences, monastic writers indicated a preference for the inclusion of Mary and John the Baptist in these compositions as they were allocated particular importance as supreme mediators.[176]

An essential part of the *deesis* iconography is the variety of the figures chosen to be represented in it by the artists and patrons. A wide range of biblical and mythological figures have been found represented in *deesis* compositions, such as saints, angels, and patrons. The figures chosen to be a part of a *deesis* composition carry significance for the viewers. The interchangeability of the intercessors serves to customize the *deesis* for its specific audience but does not serve to change the meaning behind the composition. For example, above the main entrance of the church of San Marco in Venice, a *deesis* is shown with Mary opposite Mark, instead of John the Baptist, a logical choice to adorn a church dedicated to Mark.[177] The meaning associated with Mary and John the Baptist goes beyond being simply holy persons or saints but relies on their status as powerful members of the court of Heaven and their special earthly connection to Christ. This is indicated not only by their visual proximity to Christ in these compositions but also through inscriptions in *deesis* compositions, such as in a tenth-century ivory triptych, which describes them as 'counsellors'.[178] In the case of John the Baptist depicted across from Mary, the viewer is reminded of Christ's physical connection to humanity since both Mary, his mother, and John, his cousin through his maternal line, are two of the most prominent earthly blood relations and witnesses of Christ's divinity in the New Testament.

The purpose of John the Baptist in a *deesis* painting is different from his presence in a narrative or individual depiction. While all paintings in a church take on importance as a part of

[173] Cutler, 'Under the Sign of the Deesis', 154.
[174] P. Murray and L. Murray, 'Deesis', in T. Devonshire (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art & Architecture* (Oxford, 2014) 146.
[175] Cutler, 'Under the Sign of the Deesis', 154 and Cormack *Byzantine Art*, 17.
[176] Walter, 'Two Notes on the Deesis', 334.
[177] Cutler, 'Under the Sign of the Deesis', 151.
[178] Walter, 'Two Notes on the Deesis', 333.

the liturgy in some way, the paintings of intercessors, when a part of the *deesis* scene, become a physical connection in the church between the worshipper, the intercessor, and Christ.[179] In contrast, a narrative painting illustrates a familiar story, while the individual depiction of a figure on a column or wall represents or reminds the viewer of their sacrifice or values. In the *deesis* scene, Mary and John the Baptist become important functionaries in the liturgy and in the transmission of individual prayer directly to Christ. Placing Mary and John the Baptist as equals in these compositions demonstrates his value to the Egyptian viewer and his widespread worship.

The wall paintings of the *deesis* composition from medieval Egypt can be found in secular churches and monastic settings. These monastic settings include the monastery of Macarius (**14**), the monastery of Shenoute (two examples) (**15**, **16**), the monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs (**17**), and the monastery of Antony (**18**). These five preserved *deesis* wall paintings all date from the eleventh to the early thirteenth centuries and represent some of the most recent of the representations of John the Baptist in this study. The chance preservation of these five paintings in Egypt signifies a considerable contribution to the *deesis* composition genre available for study. However, given the habitual practice of repainting walls and refreshing spaces of worship with newer paintings, older examples of *deesis* painted programs in Egypt could potentially be found in the future beneath more recent works or in yet undiscovered monastic buildings.

*Church of Macarius, Monastery of Macarius, Wadi el-Natrun (**14**)*

The monastery of Macarius, as introduced in the previous chapter, is located in the Wadi el-Natrun. Accompanying the narrative painting of the heralding of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah is a *deesis* composition on the east wall of John the Baptist opposite Mary with a central image of Christ. As with the narrative painting of Zechariah, the remaining paintings in this sanctuary are part of a single painted program dated to the Fatimid period. The *deesis* painting is the focal image on the eastern wall of the octagonal sanctuary, directly opposite the arched entrance. Crowning the painting of the *deesis* are paintings of Moses and Aaron above a decorative band. Beneath, within a pointed niche, we find Mary to the left of Christ and John to the right. The nimbate figures of

[179] Walter, 'Two Notes on the Deesis', 319.

Mary and John are shown in two encircled busts with a blue background above and on either side of Christ, who remains central to them but lower in the composition (**14**). [180]

The busts of Mary and John are turned inwards with their hands at mid-chest height, palms raised in *paraklesis*, towards Christ, this gesture indicates that this is an intercessory painting. Their faces are depicted in three quarter profile and their gaze is tilted down towards the position that Christ occupies below them in the scene, which is a unique arrangement when compared with the *deesis* paintings to follow. The full figure depiction of Christ stands forward-facing, holding a book in his left arm and his right hand making a sign of blessing. Christ is shown with dark hair and is dressed in a blue robe under a reddish-brown cloak. Mary is depicted with her head and body covered by a dark brown cloak while John is more colourfully dressed in a red robe with a yellow collar. John is represented bearded with long dark brown hair, which is depicted tidy and well-kept but long, falling down his back. The inverted pyramid of the three paintings of Mary, Christ and John the Baptist was at one time nestled amongst windows, which were filled in at an unknown time.[181] The rest of the *deesis*' painted program has sparse other motifs due to the deterioration of the plaster. What remains are faint traces of a yellow background, possibly symbolizing divine light,[182] and four painted, decorative ornaments. Two of the decorative motifs are encircled flower motifs: one to the lower left of Mary and the lower right of John; the other two smaller circular motifs are less clear. These circles could be painted representations of the sun and moon, the sun above Mary and the moon above John the Baptist which, as will be seen, are common to almost all of the *deesis* images described in this chapter.

*Church of Shenoute, Monastery of Shenoute (White Monastery), Sohag (**15**, **16**)*

The monastery of Shenoute, colloquially known as the White Monastery, is the titular monastery of the White Monastery Federation and was first founded between 447 and 449 by a monk named Pqol but is honorarily named after its more famous third abbot, Shenoute. The monastery and its

[180] Capuani, *Christian Egypt*, 86-8.
[181] Evelyn White, *Monasteries* vol 3, 104.
[182] See Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, 28: a golden or yellow background can symbolize divine light and signify that the individuals shown within it are deceased.

church fell out of use sometime in the late medieval period until it was revived by the Coptic Church in the mid-twentieth century.[183] The monastic church, called the church of Shenoute, was built in five months in 455, under the direction of Shenoute. It was constructed from limestone materials, some spoliated from the temples at Athribis located roughly 3.5 kilometers away.[184] The scale of the monastic church makes it one of the largest built in the fifth century, measuring 75 m by 37 m by 13 m high. It consists of a tri-conch sanctuary with carved niches and wall paintings, the exterior resembling a pharaonic temple.[185] The monastic complex was composed of an assortment of structures built in Late Antiquity, such as houses, dormitories, a refectory and kitchens.[186] The church itself, located in the southeast section of the archaeological site, is where we find two representations of John the Baptist. Both images are part of a *deesis* composition and in both painted programs John is shown opposite Mary.

The site has undergone many phases of exploration and restoration. The first modern conservation efforts were undertaken by the Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe which focused on the preservation of the church at the end of the nineteenth century. Shortly thereafter, Flinders Petrie excavated the area to the south of the church, since the former north and west portions of the monastic site had been taken over by the local inhabitants and were therefore inaccessible. Eventually, the Supreme Council of Antiquities put an end to the use of all parts of the archaeological site by farmers and inhabitants, which had encroached on the site, even up to the walls of the church. This was done by clearing the mudbrick homes which had been constructed in the church nave and conducting thorough excavations at the site, which allowed the valuable monastic remnants to be identified. The Egyptian Church attempted to restore the prominence of the site beginning in 1975 by re-establishing a community of monks at the monastery. In more recent times, Darlene Brooks Hedstrom and Elizabeth Bolman have organized a group of scholars to conduct research in the Sohag region on the monastery of Shenoute and the monastery of Pshoi (the Red Monastery). The Yale Monastic Archaeology Project commenced from 2002 to 2005 at the monastery of Shenoute with on site documentation, followed by surveys and excavation. Then,

[183] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 170.
[184] Capuani, *Christian Egypt*, 203.
[185] S. Davis, 'Archaeology at the White Monastery, 2005-2010', *Coptica* 9 (2010) 25-58 and Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 172.
[186] L. Blanke, *An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism: Settlement, Economy and Daily Life at the White Monastery Federation* (New Haven, 2019).

from 2005 to 2010, the scope of the project shifted to include the documentation and conservation of wall paintings and architectural features uncovered during the surveys of the church.[187] The remaining painted program of the church of Shenoute is largely contained in the eastern and southern apses of the tri-conch sanctuary with decoration remaining on some of the interior pillars and walls of the church. It is in these upper registers where we find two *deesis* representations of John the Baptist.

The more conspicuous image of John the Baptist at the church of Shenoute is found in the southern apse, which can be broadly dated to the medieval period, but no more precisely (**15**). The scene shows Mary and John on opposing sides of an adorned, encircled cross being supported by two angels on a gold background of divine light. The adorned cross is quite ornate, blue in colour and draped with a purple-like, stole. It is adorned with a medallion containing an additional cross at the apex and medallions with floral motifs on the other limbs, including at the center. On the ends of both the left and right arms of the cross are partially damaged, painted hanging censers. Mary is shown to the far left of the scene and to the far right is John the Baptist. Given the presence of both Mary and John on either side of the cross and its embellishment, size, and position of prominence, the cross becomes a personification of Christ, making this scene an intercessory painting.[188] An image of the cross personifying Christ would have been acceptable to the Christian audience as the cross was seen not only as the instrument of Christ's terrestrial death, but also as representative of his return during the Last Judgement.[189]

The nimbate John is shown standing clothed in a grey robe and a white cloak, with long, tidy, dark hair and a beard. His body is shown turned towards the left, in the direction of the adorned cross; his arms are in *paraklesis*. His head is slightly turned to the left, but his gaze is directed out of the scene towards the viewers. On the opposing side of the cross, Mary is shown in a similar manner, nimbate, wearing a white robe and a reddish-brown cloak. Her body position differs slightly from that of John; she is not turned sideways as John is, but her arms are raised in *paraklesis*, and she also looks towards the viewer. Above the heads of Mary and John the Baptist, are painted the symbols of the sun and the moon, respectively. The nimbed angels supporting the

[187] Davis, 'Archaeology at the White Monastery', 30-47.
[188] E. Bolman, 'A Medieval Flourishing at the White Monastery Federation', in E. Bolman (ed.), *The Red Monastery Church: Beauty and Asceticism in Upper Egypt* (New Haven and London, 2016) 203-15.
[189] A. Didron, *Christian Iconography* vol 1 (New York, 1851) 367-74.

cross are identical in position and appearance but differ in dress; the angel to the left of the cross wears a red robe with a blue stole while the angel to the right is dressed in a white robe and white stole. They both have short cropped curly hair and are beardless. The uppermost edge of the scene is bordered by a band of circles, some decorated with images of ornate crosses and others with depictions of unlabeled saints. Given the damage to the painting, it is difficult to determine if the contrast in wardrobe between the left and right sides of the scene is deliberate or not. The figures of Mary and the angel to the left of the cross are dressed in vivid apparel while John the Baptist and the angel to the right are wearing clothing lacking any colour.

The second *deesis* composition can be seen in the eastern semi-dome where small bust portraits in medallion of Mary and John the Baptist are painted on either side of Christ in Majesty (**16**). This composition can be dated to 1123, based on inscriptions, and was painted by an Armenian artist named Theodore.[190] The scene in the eastern semidome exhibits a massive central figure of Christ in Majesty, making up the majority of the scene, and is encircled by the four creatures of the apocalypse along a jeweled border. Christ is shown wearing a blue robe covered by a red cloak and is seated on a richly decorated, cushioned throne, one hand holding a cross-embellished book and the other raised in blessing. Outside of the circle, on Christ's right, we find an inscription in Armenian and to his left in Coptic.[191] Four large medallions, showing the evangelists writing their gospels, are also painted outside of the encircled Christ. Along the edge of the entire scene runs a decorated band with paintings of angels and plant motifs. Located at almost the top, adjacent to the head of Christ, we see the two small, encircled busts, one of John the Baptist on the right and in the other Mary on the left. John is shown nimbate with long, untidy hair and beard. He is turned three quarters towards the image of Christ and holding what appears to be a large stela. On the opposite side, Mary is shown veiled and nimbate, also three quarters turned towards Christ with at least one hand raised in *paraklesis* at chest height. Both medallions are level with the head of Christ; no other figures in this program are facing Christ or appear as closely to Christ as these two do, which suggests an elevated status being given to Mary and John. They appear to be perfectly positioned to transmit directly into Christ's ears the prayers that they are receiving from the worshippers below.

[190] M. Swanson, 'An Eclipsed History', in Bolman, *Red Monastery Church*, 193-201.
[191] Bolman, 'A Medieval Flourishing', 211.

*North Church, Monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs, Esna (**17**)*

The monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs is located in Esna, on the western bank of the Nile roughly fifty kilometers south of Luxor. The monastic sites at Esna have a long history of exploration, being attested to as far back as 1668, resulting in a long narrative of discovery, but no formal documentation until the late nineteenth century.[192] The large monastic site is composed of scattered hermitages in the desert with two central monasteries, containing churches, known as the monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs and the monastery of Matthew the Poor, both of which contain extant wall paintings. From the remaining wall paintings, we can see that the two monastic churches at the monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs, which are in use today, were at one time richly decorated, which future restoration would undoubtedly further reveal.

The larger monastic site was first formally documented by Archibald H. Sayce in 1895, who reports that the sites were vandalized less than a week after their discovery and damage was intentionally caused to the heads of the painted saints.[193] The Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe identified the monasteries as precious and worthy of conservation efforts and so in 1917 were added to a list of monuments deserving protection. After further inspection in 1934 by inspectors from the Ministry of the Interior for Lower and Upper Egypt, the monasteries were classified and then left alone until the two seasons of excavations undertaken from 1967 to 1968 by the Institut français d'archéologie orientale.[194] Roughly fifteen complexes for monastic use were documented, falling into two categories, residential buildings and non-domestic structures. From the residential structures, nine were labeled as hermitages as they were posited to be intended for habitation but for no more than one or two individuals, theoretically a monk and an initiate.[195] These hermitages, estimated to date to the sixth or seventh centuries, were built by cutting directly into the desert floor, with some of the rooms of the structures below ground and

[192] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 50-1.
[193] S. Sauneron, *Les ermitages chrétiens du désert d'Esna*, vol. 1 (Cairo, 1972) 2.
[194] G. van Loon, 'The Esna Monasteries: Dayr al-Shuhada and Dayr al-Fakhuri', in G. Takla (ed.), *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt*, vol. 2 (Cairo, 2010) 225-44.
[195] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 52.

others above.[196] As for the monastic churches at Matthew the Poor and Ammonius and the Martyrs, which are separated by roughly twenty kilometers, their formal documentation began in 1895 with measurements, descriptions and sketches being made of the remaining buildings over six years. Two separate publications were released on the paintings and inscriptions, as part of the larger campaign of Sauneron and the Institut français d'archéologie orientale in 1967. The complete publications of these campaigns were released between 1969 and 1972. [197] While evidence of painted decoration can be found in many of the buildings at these monastic sites, it is in the monastic church of Ammonius and the Martyrs where we find a *deesis* composition which includes John the Baptist.

The monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs has an unknown founding date, but as with the monastery of the Matthew the Poor, covered in Chapter 3, evidence for Christian use of the site from small finds and epigraphy dates to between 500 and 630.[198] Tradition states that either the site was chosen by Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, as part of her search for the relics of Christianity and to identify biblical sites, or that the location was chosen at the behest of Bishop Peter I of Alexandria, on the site where a massacre of the inhabitants of Esna occurred.[199] The presence of a Christian cemetery adjacent to the monastery with funerary stelae dated from the sixth and seventh centuries suggests that the monastery has Late Antique origins.[200] The monastery currently has two churches known as the New Church, founded in 1931, and the Old Church. The Old Church itself is formed of two churches, the North Church dedicated to Ammonius, and the South Church dedicated to the Martyrs, both of which are constructed from mudbrick. The current structure of the South Church dates to the late eleventh or early twelfth century, the North Church to roughly the middle of the twelfth century; both the South and the North Church have remaining wall paintings *in situ*. Paintings are located in the central room of the South Church and the *khurus* and *haykal* in the North Church.[201]

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[196] J. van der Vliet, 'Epigraphy and History in the Theban Region', in Takla, *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt* 2,147-56.
[197] R. Boutros, 'The Hermitages in the Desert of Esna', in Takla, *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt* 2, 181-200.
[198] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 263.
[199] Van Loon, 'Esna Monasteries', 226.
[200] S. Sauneron, *Quatre campagnes à Esna* (Cairo, 1959) 5.
[201] Van Loon, 'Esna Monasteries', 226-30.

The *deesis* painting from this site is found in the North Church in the south *haykal* underneath the large apse. As previously mentioned, many of the figures in the wall paintings in the old church have been defaced, including those of Mary and John, and none of the paintings in the apse have any accompanying legends. The main focus of the apse is a large painting of Christ enthroned, surrounded by a *mandorla* and with the four beasts of the apocalypse outside of the *mandorla* on an alternating red and yellow radiant background, boarded by a blue band decorated with yellow stars. Christ is attended to by two angels in the lower left and right portions of the scene as well as the sun and moon to his immediate right and left. Christ holds a book in his left hand while his right hand is raised in blessing; he is nimbate, wearing a deep red robe trimmed in yellow and jewels. The decorated book he is holding is brown in colour, has a large red cross on the cover along with many small, red, circular, starburst embellishments. Below Christ is a smaller, throned, nimbate Mary with Christ as a child on her lap. Mary is attended to by the two nimbate angels Gabriel and Michael, who stand on either side of her cushioned throne facing forward on a background of red and yellow. She wears a red cloak over a blue robe, but the smaller figure on her lap is much more difficult to discern given the damage to the painting. It appears that the small, nimbed figure of child Christ is seated on Mary's lap and is wearing a brownish robe. The angels accompanying Mary and child Christ are winged and wearing belted, yellow tunics with a circular patterned motif and red one-shouldered cloaks overtop. The angel to the right of the seated Mary and child Christ, presumably Gabriel, holds an orb in his left hand. The angel to the left, presumably Michael, holds an upright sword in his right hand and an orb in his left hand. On the inside soffit of the arch between the *haykal* and the *khurus* we can see two painted saints. These saints have been labelled in Coptic and so are identifiable as Peter, on the left, and Stephen, on the right.

The *deesis* composition itself can be seen directly adjacent to the feet of the enthroned Christ, in two small niches above the angels accompanying Mary and the child Christ. Each niche contains a painted figure which has been defaced but given their position and the visible details remaining it is likely that these images are Mary, on the viewer's right, and John the Baptist, on the left.[202] The figure of Mary is in a *mandorla*, and is shown full body, seated on an upholstered bench. In order to accommodate her full figure in the *mandorla*, she is shown smaller in scale than the opposing figure of John the Baptist. The niche has a rich yellow background with a red trim at

[202] J. Leroy, *Les peintures des couvents du desert d'esna* (Cairo, 1975) 1-16.

the top, but the background inside of the *mandorla* is tan in colour. Given the damage it is difficult to discern many details, but it appears that Mary is nimbate and wearing clothing similar in colour and style to the lower, larger, seated Mary and child Christ described above. The seated figure of Mary has both arms outstretched on either side with palms raised in the *orant* position. Opposite to Mary is another small apse where we find the painting of John the Baptist (**17**). While his face has been destroyed, we can still discern that he is nimbate and has shoulder length dark hair. Unlike Mary in the opposite apse, the painting of John shows him from the waist up and is thus larger and allows us to discern more detail from his wardrobe than is possible with the image of Mary. John is likewise shown against a yellow background, facing forward, with both arms raised to shoulder height on either side of his body with palms forward, in the *orant* position, like Mary. John is wearing a white robe with a uniquely textured yellowish tan cloak over his shoulders which is clasped at his upper chest. The cloak does not have a uniform pattern or texture but seems to be imitating an animal hide texture, with randomly placed speckles and seemingly intentionally uneven colour application. This appears to be an attempt at depicting John the Baptist wearing his most well-known visible attribute, the camel-hair garb.

To aid with the tentative dating of the painted program in the apse of the North Church, there is an inscription outside of the *haykal*, in the *khurus*, beside three large murals of the mounted Saints George, Claudius and Theodore. The inscription dates to either 1123 or 1180, the date of 1180 being more probable as the inscription mentions a Patriarch Mark.[203] It is not clear if the paintings in the *khurus* and the paintings in the apse of the south *haykal* are contemporaneous but the style of the figures of Peter and Stephen on the soffit of the arch and the mounted Claudius on the south wall of the *khurus* certainly appear to have been completed by the same hand. Because of the defacement of the figures in the apse of the *haykal*, additional points of comparison are difficult to make.

[203] Van Loon, 'Esna Monasteries', 230.

Deesis Chapel, Monastery of Antony, Eastern Desert ***(18)***

The monastery of Antony provides us with one of the best examples of a *deesis* painting as part of a larger painted program in a monastic church in Egypt. The monastery of Antony is located in the Eastern Desert near the coast of the Red Sea. In pre-modern times the monastery was extremely isolated and difficult to reach, but we know from pilgrim's accounts and *Vitae* that the monastery was on a trade route in Late Antiquity and an attraction for pilgrims. One visitor in particular, John the Little, was said to have fled from the monasteries of Wadi el-Natrun in 407, due to prolonged raiding by desert tribes. According to his *Vita*, John the Little and others remained at the monastery of Antony until his death in 409.[204] The current monastery and church are thought to have been built near or on the location of the cave which Antony used as a hermitage in the fourth century.[205] The site has not undergone complete archaeological exploration, but this traditional foundation story may have some evidence in the archaeological record, as the oldest part of the church, the *deesis* chapel in the southeast part of the building, may date to as early as the sixth century.[206] Visits to this monastic site were recorded by Rufinus in around 375 but, as with the V*ita* of John the Little, whether or not they refer to the site where the present-day monastery stands is unknown since numerous monastic sites were said to have been founded in that area after the death of Antony. Based on the development at contemporaneous monastic sites, like Kellia and Scetis, the current monastery of Antony likely began as a semi-hermitic monastery with a common well, refectory and church for the use of the ascetics living nearby. Most of the hermitic monks were likely compelled to convert to a more coenobitic style of living in the sixth century by a desire for increased security and the protection provided by physical fortification. The monastery has been inhabited almost continuously since its foundation, nearly one thousand six hundred years.[207]

The monastery of Antony has two churches, the church of the Holy Apostles built in the fifteenth century and the church of Antony, the majority of which was built in the thirteenth century. The church of Antony is a rectangular mudbrick and limestone building, with a barrel

[204] Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 56.
[205] T. Vivian, 'St. Antony the Great and the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea', in E. Bolman (ed.), *Monastic Visions* (Cairo and Atlanta, 2002) 3-17.
[206] E. Bolman, 'The Early Paintings', in Bolman, *Monastic Visions*, 31-6.
[207] Vivian, 'St. Antony', 10-6.

vault and tripartite sanctuary. The church has excellent examples of well-preserved and excellently restored wall paintings in the nave, *khurus*, sanctuary and chapel.[208] This painted program is one of the few examples of a near complete painted program from medieval Egypt and dates to 1232/1233 based on inscriptions left by the artists.[209] The thirteenth-century paintings are organized by themes dependent on the order in which the paintings are encountered by visitors when entering the church. Near the entrance of the church, we find first martyrs painted in full military gear which then transition to paintings of the founders of monasticism; the figures are all either Egyptian or were martyred in Egypt, showing a preference for a local cast of characters. The side chapel, also known as the *deesis* chapel, predates the rest of the church and may have originally been built in a natural cave; it is a very small space accommodating no more than two or three worshippers at a time. The current painted program in the *deesis* chapel is part of the larger program of the rest of the church of Antony. However, evidence of previous layers of painted decoration have been discovered on the soffit of the arch which leads into the chapel. The earliest of these layers dates to the sixth or seventh century and is evidence for the chapel predating the rest of the church. The current paintings from 1232/1233 in the *deesis* chapel are found on the upper register of the domed ceiling and in a small niche.[210]

The scene painted in the upper register of the *deesis* chapel, as the name suggests, is of a *deesis* composition with a central seated Christ in Majesty. His right hand is raised in blessing and his left holds a book on a bi-colour background with a light blue field above a yellow, lower band, which is decorated at the bottom with flora. Christ is shown in a *mandorla* being supported by four angels, two at the top and two at the base. The two nimbate top angels are identically dressed wearing grey long-sleeved tunics with red cloaks; these two angels face inwards towards Christ. The two bottom nimbate angels, however, are wearing light red tunics with red cloaks and hold the border of the *mandorla* while it rests on their backs; they face away from Christ. Outside of the *mandorla* are anthropomorphized figures of the four creatures of the apocalypse with a motif of the sun to the left of Christ and the moon to the right. Both the sun and the moon have also been anthropomorphized by the addition of facial features. The throne on which Christ is seated is painted gold and decorated with filigree and red cushions.

[208] M. Jones, 'The Church of St. Antony: The Architecture', in Bolman, *Monastic Visions*, 21-30.
[209] Vivian, 'St. Antony', 16.
[210] Bolman, 'Early Paintings', 31.

The figure of Mary is to the far left and John the Baptist to the far right, the anthropomorphized four creatures being between them and Christ. The man and the lion are found between Mary and Christ on the left and the ox and eagle are between Christ and John the Baptist on the left (**18**). The four creatures are shown winged, their bodies shaped in a very fish-like manner, with eye motifs lining their bodies. Interestingly only one of the creatures, the creature with the head of a man, is nimbate. All figures are turned inwards towards Christ with the faces in three quarter profile except for Mary who faces the viewer. The figures are also all shown with their hands raised mid-body in *paraklesis*. Mary is wearing a red cloak over a cream-coloured robe which is embellished with blue and red stripes. John wears a light brown, textured cloak with a grey trim over a long-sleeved, dark brown robe. The robe is cinched at the waist with a leather belt, and he is barefoot. The texture of his cloak is certainly unique when compared to the clothing of the other figures. The clothing of Christ and Mary both displays delicate embroidery while John's is shown as a rough cloak which has been trimmed with either a fur or fleece. John is shown with a long, dark brown unkempt beard and hair; his hair is shown in a style likely familiar to the modern viewer, that is, short on the top but longer across his shoulders and down his back. Unique to this characterization of John the Baptist, the figure is painted with a rather forlorn expression on his face. The other figures in the painted program maintain neutral facial expressions and John alone is displaying emotion. This is a noticeable development of artistic style, and it is interesting to note that in the *deesis* chapel at the church of Antony, only John the Baptist is given this treatment.

Conclusion

These five *deesis* images are separated by little more than one hundred years, from the eleventh to the early thirteenth century but nonetheless show the variable and traditional elements of this genre. The church of the Shenoute monastery (**15**) provides an excellent example of the popularity of the genre given the presence of two *deesis* paintings in the same church with such different styles of composition but painted within roughly a century of each other. While the sample size of the remaining *deesis* paintings is limited for the drawing of concrete conclusions, the combination of Mary and John the Baptist in a *deesis* was clearly a favourite for the early medieval viewer. The

limited availability of earlier examples of painted *deesis* compositions in Egypt proves to be a restrictive factor in our ability to observe and draw conclusions. John the Baptist as an intercessory figure, in these *deesis* paintings, is shown as an equal to Mary in his power of intercession on behalf of humanity. John and Mary are shown physically close to Christ in the compositions, in relation to other figures, and are also frequently the only ones who face Christ directly, with their hands raised towards him. Other figures in the program are often shown with their gaze averted or physically turned away from Christ. This position suggests that, in these *deesis* programs, they alone could communicate directly with Christ.

Although all five examples of the painted *deesis* composition described above are quite distinct from one another, even when painted in the same church, the two most dissimilar examples are found in the church of Macarius and in the southern apse of the church of Shenoute. These two paintings show the variability available to the artist when painting a *deesis*. At the monastery of Macarius (**14**), the *deesis* found in the octagonal sanctuary is accompanied by both narrative and individual depictions from the Old and New Testaments. Unlike the other programs, this *deesis* is painted in a pointed niche on a flat wall, not up in the apse of the dome. Another difference is the placement of John the Baptist and Mary above Christ instead of to the direct left and right, which was necessary because of the windows of this wall. This program also has the least overt apocalyptic imagery; from what remains of the painted program, there appear to be only two small, faded circles above the paintings of Mary and John the Baptist, which could be the sun and moon motifs. In the second painting, in the southern apse of the church of Shenoute (**15**) we can observe the only program where Christ is not represented as a human man, but instead as an ornate, jeweled, and shrouded cross. This program also has a unique colour palate when compared with the other *deesis* paintings; the background of the apse is painted a vibrant golden-yellow. The figures and the cross are painted white, beige, blue and red but the majority of the scene is overwhelmed by the bold yellow background.

The three *deesis* paintings with the most in common are found in the eastern apse of the church of Shenoute, the apse of the North Church at the monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs and the *deesis* chapel in the church of Antony (**16**, **17**, **18**). These three compositions use a very similar colour scheme, with a preference for red, yellow and some blue, they also have the most overt connections to the theme of the apocalypse as they have the additional representations of the

four creatures along with the sun and moon motifs. While the manner of dress of the figures in all of the *deesis* programs is almost identical, a cloak or robe over a tunic, these three programs prefer to show these fabrics as richly embellished with either jewels or embroidery. The colours and decorations of these three programs impart a richness and opulence to the portrayed court of heaven over which Christ is presiding.

There does not appear to be one preferred art style for the paintings of the *deesis*, some are rather minimalist, such as the earliest painting at the monastery of Macarius, with very mellow blue and red tones. In comparison, the other four monasteries seem to prefer embellished, jeweled details with an inclination for bold red and golden yellow colours. Additionally, there does not seem to be a preference for accompanying figures when it comes to the *deesis* with John the Baptist, Mary and Christ. Some include paintings of angels as the servants of Christ, found in three of the programs: the southern apse of the church of Shenoute, the North Church of the monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs and the *deesis* chapel of the church of Antony (**15**, **17**, **18**). Moreover, in four of the paintings, the church of Macarius, the southern apse of the church of Shenoute, the monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs, and the monastery of Antony (**14**, **15**, **17**, **18**), we have apocalyptic symbols of the sun and moon painted above Mary and John the Baptist, respectively. The sun and moon representing not only the eternity of Christ, but that Mary was the prophet of Christ's birth, the rising of the sun, and John the prophet of his death, the end of Christ's days on earth. Outside of these examples, the variability of accompanying images increases, with martyrs, saints, desert fathers and evangelists all making appearances. However, the similarities of the central Christ in Majesty with Mary always on the right-hand side of Christ and John the Baptist always on the left and the ever-present apocalyptic overtones provide some homogeneity to the *deesis* theme.

As for John the Baptist himself, his appearance is just as varied as the painted programs themselves. He is always shown with long brown hair and a beard, but that is where the similarities end. The paintings of John the Baptist are not painted in any uniform manner as his dress, hair, and general hygienic condition change from composition to composition. For example, in the earliest painting at the monastery of Macarius (**14**), John the Baptist is shown in a red cloak with tidy hair and beard and a neutral countenance, while in the latest painting at the monastery of Antony (**18**) he is disheveled, wearing a much heavier-looking brown cloak over a brown tunic and a forlorn

expression on his face. In only two of the paintings, at the monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs and the monastery of Antony (**17**, **18**), could it be suggested that he is wearing a camel-skin garment and leather belt as described in the Gospels.[211] This lack of standardized appearance, attribute, or any legends could indicate that his presence opposite Mary in a *deesis* composition was expected and therefore any further indication as to his identity was deemed unnecessary by the artists and their patrons. Even though the small sample size of the *deesis* compositions in Egypt does not allow for concrete conclusions to be drawn, we can nonetheless observe that in the monastic churches of the early medieval period John the Baptist was important to the faithful and considered a close family member.

[211] Matthew 3:4 and Mark 1:4.

Chapter 3
Individual Depictions of John the Baptist

Individual depictions or non-narrative paintings of John the Baptist provide the most numerous examples of paintings of John in the monastic art of Egypt. He is included amongst groups of saints, Church fathers and Old Testament figures, an attestation to the importance associated with his figure to the monastic community. Individual depictions, because of their lack of context, in theory rely more heavily on portraying individuals using recognizable attributes, legends and texts. Individual depictions are purposefully chosen for the symbolic ideals that they represent and their meaning to the monastic audience. John the Baptist was a meaningful figure in monastic art because of his asceticism as well as his familial connection and role in the story of Christ. As with Elijah and Christ, who both partook in ascetic sojourns or dedicated their lives to the practice, John the Baptist lived his early life in the wilderness of Judaea. He is famous for having been sustained by 'locusts and wild honey'.[212] Not only was John the Baptist a model ascetic, but he also has a close association with Christ. This closeness came not just from being a relation of Christ, but because John was a prophet of Christ's coming and the first to acknowledge him as the Messiah.[213] The *Liturgy of Cyril* summarizes his roles within the New Testament by calling him the forerunner, prophet and martyr.[214] However, it was likely John the Baptist's early life of extreme asceticism which provided the most inspiration for the ascetics living in the monasteries of Egypt.

Beyond being merely illustrations of Christian stories of sacrifice or representations of ideals, the wall paintings in spaces of worship were considered an integral part of prayer. As we saw in the previous chapter, the figures in the *deesis* paintings became a mechanism for the transmission of prayer to the upper echelons of the court of Heaven. Figures outside of intercessory scenes also have a function in prayer. The functions of these individual depictions were likely multifaceted and personal to each worshipper. Nevertheless, some hypotheses have been made as to their purpose. Primarily it is thought that individual depictions guided prayer and kept a

[212] Matthew 3:4.
[213] John 1:29-51.
[214] U. Zanetti and S. Davis, 'Liturgy and Ritual Practice in the Shenoutean Federation', in Bolman, *Red Monastery Church*, 27-35.

worshipper's mind focused during hours of devotion.[215] Connections have been found between the organization of the figures chosen for the painted programs of the churches and prayers of remembrance. These prayers, known as eucharistic liturgies such as the *Liturgy of St. Cyril*, repeat a list of important individuals to be remembered in prayer. These persons include holy fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs. In the liturgy, Mary, John the Baptist and Stephen are mentioned by name and in a line at the end of this list, it calls John a prophet, forerunner and martyr.[216] A secondary function of these paintings was to encourage the monks during their quest for personal transformation through imitation of Christ (*imitatio Christi*). This was achieved by reminding the worshipper of the saints, martyrs and holy persons who had already achieved this goal and entered Heaven.[217] Regardless of the meaning or purpose of the paintings, they provide an opportunity to see representations of important Christian figures in the way that early Christians saw them and the attributes which helped identify those individuals to the viewers at that time.

Many monasteries included individual depictions of John the Baptist as part of their painted programs; it is likely that many other examples existed at one time but have been lost as with many other paintings from early Christian Egypt. The monasteries with examples of individual depictions of John the Baptist are the monastery of Abu Hennes (**19**, **20**, **21**), the monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit (**22**, **23**), the church in the festival hall of Tuthmosis III at Karnak (**24**), the monastery of Pshoi (Red Monastery) (**25**), the monastery of Macarius (**26**), and the monastery of Matthew the Poor (**27**).

*Quarry Church of John the Baptist, Monastery of Deir Abu Hennes (**19**, **20**, **21**)*

The quarry church dedicated to John the Baptist in the monastery of Abu Hennes featured heavily in Chapter 1, due to the extensive narrative friezes featuring the conception and early life of John the Baptist, dated to between the sixth and the eighth centuries. Outside the painted narrative friezes there are also three figural paintings of John the Baptist: one each in the sanctuary, the narthex, and the baptistry. These paintings are contemporaneous with the friezes of the narthex and

[215] Bolman, '*Mimesis*, Metamorphosis', 65-77.
[216] Zanetti and Davis, 'Liturgy and Ritual', 27-35.
[217] Bolman, '*Mimesis*', 70.

the baptistry and add to the overall theme of the church since it is hypothesized to be dedicated to John the Baptist based on the graffiti and these paintings.[218]

The most certainly identifiable depiction of John the Baptist can be found in the church sanctuary on the west wall. The composition is made up of a central Christ with John the Baptist to the left and Zechariah to the right (**19**).[219] The figure of John the Baptist is heavily damaged, with most of the painting missing from the head, right side and bottom. The figure is wearing a long amber tunic with a textured over-cloak, just as in the next representation, in the narthex. The figure is nimbate, with long, dark hair and a beard and holds a scroll with his left hand. Enough of the text remains on the scroll to identify it as from the Gospel of John, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'.[220] This quote is regularly associated with John the Baptist and therefore serves to securely identify him as the figure in this composition. This in turn aids with the identification of the next figure, at the center of the frieze in the narthex.

In the narthex, along with the narrative frieze, there is a second frieze depicting a series of fourteen standing figures with John the Baptist as the central figure. The frieze is painted directly onto the western rock face and is composed of two groups of nimbate saints on either side of a central John the Baptist. Each saint is separated from the next by a small palm tree (**20**). All of the figures are facing forward, and some are identifiable by legends. From left to right they are: Patermouthis, Arsene, Macarius, Cosmas, Damian and Domitius; the remaining eight figures are unidentifiable. The wardrobes of the unknown figures have attributes of ascetic dress, which, along with the other identified ascetic figures, suggests that all fourteen figures were monks or ascetics.[221] The figure of John the Baptist does not have a legend; instead, he is distinguished by his costume. The painting has suffered from damage to the face and bottom; what remains is a nimbate figure with long brown hair and a pointed beard in an *orans* position. The wardrobe of the figure is a belted, amber-coloured tunic topped by a cloak which is fastened mid-chest with a large, round clasp. The cloak is described as being textured in the manner reminiscent of an animal pelt, perhaps a camel-hair cloak and belt as described by the New Testament.[222]

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[218] G. van Loon and A. Delattre, 'La frise des saints de l'église rupestre de Deir Abou Hennis', *Eastern Christian Art* 1 (2004) 89-112.
[219] Van Loon and Delattre, 'Frieze des saints', 111.
[220] John 1:29.
[221] Van Loon and Delattre, 'Frieze des saints', 95-101.
[222] Matthew 3:4 and Mark 1:6.

The third and final individual depiction from the church of John the Baptist comes from within the baptistry. Painted directly on the rock wall, to the left of the baptismal font, is a painting of the bust of Elizabeth holding the infant John within a medallion (**21**). This painting was originally identified by Clédat as the Virgin Mary with an infant Christ,[223] but later examination has shown this image to be Elizabeth with the infant John the Baptist. The sole image available for examination is in black and white and shows a great amount of damage to the figures, and therefore no comments can be made on the costumes, attributes or general appearance of the figures.[224] Nevertheless, the inclusion of a medallion with Elizabeth and the infant John the Baptist, along with the narrative friezes and other figural paintings makes this church the site of the largest concentration of paintings of John the Baptist found thus far. This plethora of paintings, both narrative and individual depictions, along with the numerous graffiti referencing John, are evidence that this church was likely an importance center for the worship of the cult of John the Baptist in Upper Egypt.[225]

*Church of the Archangel Michel and Chapel XXXII, Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit (**22**, **23**)*

The monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit, also featured in Chapter 1 of this study, contains two individual depictions of John the Baptist, one within the Church of the Archangel Michael and the other in Chapel XXXII. The excavation and documentation of the church of the Archangel Michael, previously identified as the North Church by Clédat, and Chapel XXXII were begun in 1901. It resulted in the partial exposure of the exterior walls, aisle, pillars, and columns of the North Church.[226] However, during the course of the excavation the removal of sand caused the partial collapse of the west wall, north wall, and south gate resulting in a halt to the further removal of sand. This meant leaving roughly two meters of sand above the floor level throughout the church when the initial photographs were taken of the wall paintings. The site was then backfilled and left undisturbed by archaeologists. The church was next documented during a modern campaign began

[223] Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', 52.
[224] Van Loon, '"…That the Mountain of the Goly Wilderness…"', 260.
[225] Van Loon, '"…That the Mountain of the Goly Wilderness…"', 275.
[226] J. Clédat, 'Recherches sur le Kôm de Baouît', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 46.5 (1902) 525-46.

in 2003 by a Louvre and Institut français d'archéologie orientale team led by D. Bénazeth. The results of this new excavation were the documentation of stratigraphy, the layout of the church, as well as documentation of the construction techniques and the religious use of the space. Through the examination of the pottery, the tentative date of construction for the church was determined to be the seventh century.

The church of the Archangel Michel has extant remains of paintings on all architectural stone and wooden structures in the space. The examinations of the paintings led to the identification of five layers of paintings in the church, but no more precise dating was provided by Clédat. Later examinations resulted in a wide range of proposed dates between the sixth and twelfth centuries based on the themes and styles of the wall paintings.[227] The church is divided into a nave, *khurus* and sanctuary. It is on the east wall of the sanctuary where we can identify a mural within a large niche, containing a painting of John the Baptist. The east wall is divided into upper and lower zones; the lower zones of the wall, both outside and inside the niche, are decorated with geometric patterns. In the upper zone, four paintings of individuals can be found, two inside and two outside of the niche. The two painted figures outside of the niche, both of which have been badly damaged, have been tentatively identified as Moses and Aaron. The upper wall within the niche contains a painting of John the Baptist on the left and his father Zechariah on the right (**22**). All of what remains of the figure of John the Baptist is a small portion of painted plaster from the middle part of his body. From this plaster we can observe that he is wearing a dark robe and carries in his left hand an unfurled scroll with part of the text from the Gospel of John discernable.[228] The figure of Zechariah is likewise damaged, with only the painted plaster from his mid-body extant. However, his figure is identifiable by the high priest wardrobe and the censer he is swinging with his right hand. The combination of the scroll with the text from the Gospel of John and the figure of Zechariah to the right provides sufficient evidence to identify the damaged figure in the niche as John the Baptist.[229]

Chapel XXXII is a square-shaped building of unknown purpose which contains individual depictions and a narrative scene. As with Chapels XVII, XXX, and LI, described in Chapter 1,

[227] D. Bénazeth, 'Chronologie de l'église nord', in D. Bénazeth (ed.) *L'église de l'Archange-Michel dans le monastère copte de Baouît* (Cairo, 2021) 467-74.
[228] John 1:29.
[229] D. Bénazeth, 'Décor peint sur les murs et les supports en calcaire', in Bénazeth, *L'église de l'Archange-Michel*, 289-324.

these buildings and their associated paintings cannot be more precisely dated than a range of the sixth to ninth century.[230] The individual depiction of John the Baptist is found on the north wall of this room, directly opposite the only entrance; it is a bust *in clipeus* within a niche, being supported by angels on either side over a lush background (**23**). The figure of John is nimbed with long, dark hair and beard wearing a white cloak clasped high on the chest with a circular fibula. The base tunic is light brown or tan with a ragged neckline, almost like a tanned animal's hide. The figure is also adorned with two symbols, the first is an *Agnus Dei* in a grey disk on his left shoulder and the second is an 'H' symbol on the right shoulder of his cloak. The north wall of Chapel XXXII also features the paintings of monastic saints Apa Amoun and Paul on the wall outside of the niches, as well as an eagle in a niche to the left of the painting of John the Baptist. The other paintings in the room are individual depictions of Zechariah, Mary, and eagles in the same style as John the Baptist, busts *in clipeus*. Paintings of monastic figures such as Panejou, Sarapamon, George and Samuel are shown outside of the niches on the walls. The only narrative scene in the room is of David, shown within a niche on the south wall, to the right of the entrance. This painting of John the Baptist was originally misidentified as Christ by Clédat,[231] but this has recently been corrected to John the Baptist.[232]

The two paintings from Bawit discussed here are very different from one another, though both exemplify the importance of attributes for the identification of individual depictions. For the painting in the church of Archangel Michael, if not for the scroll with the passage from the Gospel of John, what remains of the painting of John the Baptist would be unidentifiable. In the case of the bust of John the Baptist in Chapel XXXII, the distinct clothing of the figure alone could not be relied upon to distinguish John from Christ. These similarities in physical appearance, between John the Baptist and Christ, led Clédat to initially misidentify the figure. But here the *Agnus Dei* and perhaps the presence of Zechariah help to positively identify the figure as John the Baptist.

[230] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 200-22.
[231] Clédat, *Monastère et la nécropole de Baouît*, vol. 2, 11-15.
[232] K. Innemée, 'Funerary Aspects in the Paintings from the Apollo Monastery at Bawit', in G. Gabra and H. Takla (eds), *Christianity and Monasticism in Middle Egypt* (Cairo and New York, 2015) 241-53.

Church in the Festival Hall of Tuthmosis III *in the Temple of Amun, Karnak (**24**)*

The temple of Amun at Karnak contains the remains of an unnamed monastic church built in the festival hall of Tuthmosis III which served an unknown monastic community, founded at an unknown date. The massive temple complex is the location of at least three churches, all of which are unattested to in the written sources. The discovery of papyri at the Christian settlement of Jeme, dated to the eighth century, provides the names for two Christian sites on the east bank of the Nile. The Christian sites mentioned in the papyri are the monastery of Serge and a sanctuary of Father Stephen. None of the graffiti or inscriptions at the Karnak temple complex mention a specific name for any of the monastic communities which could have been located near or at the complex, which makes exact identification of the monastery associated with the church in the festival hall of Tuthmosis III impossible at this time.

The first archaeological mentions of the Christian site came in the late nineteenth-century as a brief remark in the excavation reports completed for the pharaonic temple complex.[233] The first report published with a focus on documenting the Christian reuse of the site was completed by H. Munier and M. Pillet in 1928. They documented the paintings, graffiti, inscriptions, and architectural remains, found throughout the complex, with sketches and photographs. They also transcribed red *dipinti*, found painted on a column, which lists the names of at least fourteen church fathers, which would have been referenced as part of the liturgy.[234] These names, ten of which are discernable, include those of Besa and Shenoute, which may suggest a connection between this monastic community and that of the White Monastery Federation in Sohag.[235] These paintings and *dipinti* have suffered severe deterioration since being recorded by Munier and Pillet resulting in the paintings, legends and *dipinti* being now barely visible.[236] The inscribed and painted Christian names found in the graffiti have been dated to the sixth or seventh century, suggesting Late Antique Christian use at the site. [237]

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[233] E. Ghaly, 'The Coptic Monastery at the First Pylon of Karnak Temple', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 53 (2017) 105-22.
[234] H. Munier and M. Pillet, 'Les édifices chrétiens de Karnak', *Revue de l'Égypte ancienne* 2 (1928) 58-88.
[235] Van der Vliet, 'Epigraphy and History', 147-55.
[236] R. Coquin, 'La christianisation des temples de Karnak', *Bulletin de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale* 72 (1972) 169-78.
[237] Papaconstantinou, *Culte*, 113.

The church in the festival hall of Tuthmosis III was built amongst the columns of the temple to Amun. As part of the transformation of the space, a roof was built over the hall, apses were created, and paintings were produced to complete its transformation from open air temple to church.[238] This hall is a long rectangular space, 43 by 15 meters, containing 32 pillars. It is at the top of some of these pillars, below the capitals and directly on the stone, where the traces of Christian paintings can still be found. Based on the orientation of the paintings, Munier and Pillet posited that the altar of the church was oriented to the south. The figures are identified by legends, which can be seen on six of the nine pillars. These figures are: Colluthus, Panegyris, Mercurius, Pidjimi, Claudius of Antioch, Apollonius of Alexandria, Aaron, Martinianus, Paul, King David, Antony, Andrew, Dioscurus, Severus, John Chrysostom, Amon, Besa, a Father Theodore, the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste and John the Baptist. No other remains of a painted program have been found in this church apart from what remains on the columns. The figures chosen infer a preference for individuals who have a connection to Upper Egypt, such as Colluthus and Pidjimi both of whom were martyred at Antinoopolis.[239] The inclusion of figures such as Severus and Dioscorus provide a *terminus post quem* for the paintings of the mid-sixth century.[240] When considered together, the graffiti, paintings of monastic saints, and the presence of a litany suggests that the site has been reused by a monastic community, though the exact nature and extent of the community remains unclear.[241]

The painting of John the Baptist can be found at the top of pillar number four in the eastern section of columns, as identified by Munier and Pillet. He is depicted as a full figure and nimbed, with his arms at his sides (**24**). He is wearing a heavy, dark cloak over a lighter, yellow-coloured tunic. He has long dark hair and his right-hand crosses to the left side of his body gesturing towards another figure, of whom all that remains is one small arm in the *orans* position. Above the head of John, right below the capital of the column, is the legend ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτιστής 'Saint John the Baptist'.[242] To the right of John can be seen the remains of the text from the Gospel of John,[243] bordered on the far right by the remains of a painted decorative palm tree. Given the position of

[238] P. Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten* (Leiden, 2002) 22-3.
[239] Munier and Pillet, 'Édifices', 64-74.
[240] G. van Loon and A. Delattre, 'The Frieze of Saints in the Cave Church of Deir Abou Hennis: Correction and Addition', *Eastern Christian Art* 2 (2005) 167-8.
[241] Cf. Ghaly, 'Coptic Monastery', 120-1.
[242] Munier and Pillet, 'Édifices', 71.
[243] John 1:29.

the hand of John the Baptist, crossing his body to gesture towards his left, one could posit that he is gesturing in the direction of Christ, as in the monastery of Pshoi, fulfilling his role as a prophet. However, no such painting of Christ is extant in the church in the festival hall of Tuthmosis III.

*Triconch Basilica, monastery of Pshoi (Red Monastery), Sohag (**25**)*

The monastery of Pshoi, commonly known as the Red Monastery, is located in Sohag and is the site of a triconch *basilica* built in the early fifth century. This monastic church contains a rich, remarkably preserved painted program with numerous individual depictions including a painting of John the Baptist. This *basilica* was constructed with a rectangular hall, complete with columns, which led to the triconch sanctuary. The Red Monastery is a part of the White Monastery Foundation, which also includes the monastery of Shenoute (White Monastery) and the women's monastery at Athribis. The Red Monastery is located 3 km north of the monastery of Shenoute and was built fifty years afterwards, the Red Monastery church built as a smaller copy of the church of Shenoute.[244] The triconch *basilica* design of the Red Monastery represents one of the best-preserved examples of this type of church. The triconch element is itself not unusual in Late Antiquity, but the combination of a triconch sanctuary with a *basilica* is rare for the fifth century.[245] The sanctuary contains extensive interior decoration with sculpted architectural features, ornamental decorative painting as well as extensive painted figural representations.

The monastery was named after its founder, Pshoi, who lived in the mid-fourth century. He lived as a hermit and collected a following which grew into a semi-hermitic community, ostensibly not far from the current location of the monastic complex. Later, the community became coenobitic in nature and the monastery was built, while formal rules for the new monastery were established. This monastery remained active until its abandonment in the fourteenth century.[246] All that remains standing today is the richly decorated monastic *basilica*. It underwent multiple phases of construction at unknown points during the medieval period, the western part of the enclosed church

[244] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 170-2.
[245] D. Kinney, 'The Type of the Triconch Basilica', in Bolman, *Red Monastery Church*, 37-47.
[246] S. Emmel and B. Layton, 'Pshoi and the Early History of the Red Monastery', in Bolman, *Red Monastery Church*, 11-5.

collapsed and the sanctuary and *khurus* within the triconch were sealed off. Then, during the early modern period, mudbrick dwellings were built in the ruins of the collapsed western portion, to serve as dwellings for the priests and their families. The paintings themselves were encased behind mudbrick walls, built inside the basilica as a sort of double wall to support the tri-conch domes, which must have been seen to be at risk of collapse.[247]

Six phases of wall paintings were identified during restoration of the *basilica*, spanning from the late fifth to approximately the thirteenth century. The majority of the remaining visible painted program belong to the second and third phases of painting, which date to the sixth century. The paintings were badly damaged and obscured due to centuries of oil and smoke residue. The first modern era restoration of the church was undertaken by Le comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe in 1909. The Comité purchased and removed the homes which had been built in the eastern part of the open nave and built a wall to separate the now clear part of nave and the triconch sanctuary. The next phase took place in 1990, when Father Basilios, with the permission of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, removed the rest of the mudbrick homes in the nave, as well as the mudbrick homes built along the outside of the walls, and then reinforced these walls. In 1999, clerical leadership acquired the land surrounding the monastery and built perimeter walls to enclose both the new and original monastic lands. The most recent phase of examination came during the extensive conservation of the wall paintings by a team led by Elizabeth Bolman, which took place between 2002 and 2012. This decade-long preservation removed the buildup of centuries of residue, thereby restoring the polychrome wall paintings. Despite the thick residue, the paintings were found to be in an excellent state of preservation, the result of which can be almost certainly attributed to the decision, at an unknown point, to cover the surfaces of the paintings in the triconch with mudbrick to support the semi-domes. [248]

The interior of the triconch sanctuary is adorned with paintings of diverse Christian figures and motifs including John the Baptist and his father Zechariah (**25**). Both figures are found in the program of the southern semi-dome and belong to the third phase of painting, dating to between 550 and 600. The programs in the three painted apses represent Christ in different aspects: the eastern dome shows Christ in Majesty, the northern dome as an infant nursing on the lap of Mary,

[247] Emmel and Layton, 'Pshoi', 11-15.
[248] E. Bolman, 'Introduction', in Bolman, *Red Monastery Church*, xxi-xxxvi.

and the southern semi-dome Christ as *logos*. The paintings of John and Zechariah can be found on either side of Christ *logos*, along with the figures of the Archbishops Dioscorus and Peter I as well as the disciples. The figures of John, Zechariah, Dioscorus and Peter I are painted on columns. While there are carved stone columns in the sanctuary, the ones on which these four figures appear are not true architectural features but painted architectural elements. John is shown nimbate with long, brown, unkempt hair and beard wearing a long ochre robe, a greyish brown, textured cloak, and sandals. His face is shown looking three quarters to his left, towards the image of Christ. His right arm crosses his chest, palm upturned towards Christ. His left hand holds his cloak. Above this image on the column capital is the legend, ο αγιος ιωανν[ης], 'Saint John'.[249] Curiously, John is shown shorter in stature than the other three figures on columns. To compensate for this, he has been painted standing on a pedestal so that his head is level with those of the other figures. To the left of John are paintings of the evangelists John and Mark, shown larger and standing holding their gospels; the group ends with the painted figure of Peter I on his column.

The figure of Zechariah is directly on Christ's left. Unlike John, Zechariah is shown facing forward and dressed in finer garments: an ochre cloak with an ochre and white robe which covers his feet. Zechariah is shown as an older man, nimbate, with long white hair and a beard holding his cloak with his left hand and a censer with his right, a symbol of his profession as a high priest in the temple. The image of Zechariah also has an associated legend at the top of the column, which reads ο αγιος ζαχαριας 'Saint Zechariah'.[250] To the left of Zechariah are the evangelists Luke and Matthew, shown standing, larger, and holding their gospels. To the far right is the archbishop of Alexandria Dioscorus, who was exiled for his miaphysite position after the Council of Chalcedon. He is shown facing straight forward like Zechariah, on a painted column. The eight figures mentioned above make up only the bottom half of the painted program in the apse of the southern semi-dome. The image of Christ *logos* rises from the bottom to the top of the apses and so is incorporated into both the lower and upper registers. The upper level of decoration includes two angels with fruiting trees as well as arches, decorated with circle motifs, which pass over the four figures to the left and right of the central Christ.

[249] P. Dilley, 'Appendix 1', in Bolman, *Red Monastery Church*, 288-300.
[250] Dilley, 'Appendix 1', 295.

The church of the Red Monastery boasts an impressive display of art, every centimeter is filled with a polychrome mix of individual depictions of figures, painted architectural features and geometric designs. Analysis of the figures in the southern semi-dome resulted in the observation that the figures on the pillars, John the Baptist, Zechariah, Peter I and Dioscorus should be viewed as pairs. The first two nearest Christ, John and Zechariah, are both considered priests, prophets and martyrs of the old covenant. Peter I and Dioscorus were also both priests and martyrs, representing the ideals of the faith and the miaphysite position, Peter I for being the ideal martyr and Dioscorus for his committed support of miaphysitism.[251] The figure of John is at Christ's right hand, shown in ascetic garb and perhaps his camel-hair cloak. The placement of John alone on a pedestal is either an artist covering a miscalculation or an intentional way to raise John above the other figures who have been displayed in a similar manner.

*Church of Macarius, Monastery of Macarius, Wadi el-Natrun (**26**)*

The monastery of Macarius in the Wadi el-Natrun has already been mentioned in the previous two chapters as it has both extant narrative and *deesis* paintings. It will also be covered in this chapter due to the presence of an individual depiction of John the Baptist in the sanctuary of Benjamin, which, like the sanctuary of John the Baptist, where the narrative and *deesis* paintings of John are found, is dated to the Fatimid period (909-1171). The paintings within the sanctuary of Benjamin are all figural and the sanctuary painting scheme has been split into two sections. The first section, on the west wall, depicts a central enthroned Christ attended by the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, to his immediate left and right. Continuing on either side of the archangels, within painted arches, are the twelve apostles ending with John the Baptist to the farthest right and Stephen to the farthest left (**26**).[252] In the lower zone of the west wall, to the right of the entrance, are two equestrian saints, Claudius and Menas. In the second zone, on the north, east and south walls, the Twenty-Four Elders are depicted within a row of arches.[253]

[251] Bolman, 'The Iconography of Salvation', 146-9.
[252] Zibawi, *Images de l'Égypte*, 148-159.
[253] Van Loon and Immerzeel, 'Coptic Wall-Paintings', 18-22.

The painting of John the Baptist is identifiable by the legend ωαννης and his distinct attributes. He is depicted as a full-length standing figure, nimbate, with long, dark hair and a beard, holding a disk and a rolled scroll in his left hand. With his right hand, he points towards the disk. The disk itself is adorned with the image of the *Agnus Dei*, referencing the Gospel of John.[254] John is wearing two layers of clothing, the bottom layer is a dark red tunic, belted at the waist, while the top layer is a brown cloak, trimmed in white and clasped at mid-chest. The over-cloak and belt are likely representations of his iconic wardrobe of the camel-skin and leather belt as the cloak edge looks to be shearling. The background paintings consist of ornately decorated columns supporting an archway which continues around the entire room; with each saint or church father appearing under his own arch.[255] The painting has been damaged and the lower third of the figure of John is no longer extant.

The dating of the paintings in both the sanctuary of Benjamin and the sanctuary of John the Baptist is a range of roughly three hundred years, from 909-1171. Despite this close date range, the style of painting between the two sanctuaries is noticeably different. Both sanctuaries have suffered from plaster loss and therefore the complete painted program is unavailable for analysis. Nevertheless, one can observe that the sanctuary of John the Baptist features lighter colours with thinner outlines used to shade the figures while the sanctuary of Benjamin uses rich colours and thick black outlining. The way in which both depict John the Baptist is also interesting, in the *deesis* scene of the sanctuary of John the Baptist he is shown with no attributes. However, in the sanctuary of Benjamin, John the Baptist is shown wearing a fur, carrying the *Agnus Dei* and is identified with a legend.

*Church of Matthew, Monastery of Matthew the Poor, Esna (**27**)*

The monastery of Matthew the Poor is another unique monastic setting in Esna, along with the monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs, introduced in Chapter 2. Both are part of a larger monastic network in the area which includes hermitages in the near desert. As with the monastery

[254] John 1:29.
[255] Van Loon and Delattre, 'Frieze des saints', 111.

of Ammonius and the Martyrs, the excavations at Esna began in the 1967/1968 season with the Institut français d'archéologie orientale spending two seasons documenting the fifteen monastic residences and structures around the Esna area, including the churches of the monasteries of Ammonius and the Martyrs and Matthew the Poor. The monastery was reportedly founded by its namesake, Matthew the Poor, who lived in the early eighth century according to his *Vita*.[256] However, archaeological evidence suggests that monks lived a semi-hermitic life at this monastic site beginning between 500 and 630. The community relied upon communal churches, keeps, kitchens and refectories for their weekly gatherings.[257] The monastery of Matthew the Poor seems to have been built on top of older building remnants, but no further details are known about the foundation date of the monastery.[258] The exact date for its abandonment is likewise unknown, though the monastery was repopulated by a few monks in 1975 and remained in use for Mass and on feast days.[259]

The church of Matthew the Poor contains a square-shaped nave topped with a dome, a *khurus*, and a narthex. The oldest extant architectural features of the church date from the eighth century. They consist of the pillars in the nave and *khurus* along with part of the north wall. Wall paintings can be found in the dome of the square nave, on the supporting arches and the soffits of the arches.[260] An inscription in the northwest corner reveals the identity of a donor and, more importantly for our purposes, the date of 1148/1149. The paintings of the church have suffered from plaster loss and smoke damage as well as whitewashing at several points since their creation. As a result, the painting scheme has been greatly reduced from its original state. Based on style and composition, two phases of painting can be identified in the church. The first encompasses the bulk of the remaining paintings, which be dated on the basis of the inscription to around the mid-twelfth century. The second is limited to a small painting of a man in a tower in the southwest corner of the nave.

What remains of the painted program consists of individual depictions on the pillars and soffits of arches as well as where the arches meet at the corners, beneath the dome. The corners

[256] Van Loon, 'Esna Monasteries', 233.
[257] Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape*, 263.
[258] S. Sauneron, 'Les neuvième et dixième campagnes archéologiques à Esna', *Bulletin de l'Institute français d'archéologie orientale* 67 (1969) 87-116.
[259] Van Loon, 'Esna Monasteries', 235.
[260] Sauneron, 'Neuvième et dixième campagnes', 101-3.

connecting the arches are decorated with angels opposite seraphim, while the pillars are adorned with paintings of saints such as Matthew the Archimandrite, John the Evangelist, and others. The soffit of the northern arch is painted with the busts of the twelve apostles, with Christ occupying the position at the apex of the arch. The soffit of the southern arch is decorated with two full figure paintings, one of whom may be Matthew, and the other is unknown. The northern soffit arch is painted with ten prophets of the Old Testament, and the soffit of the eastern arch is decorated with a full length painting of John the Baptist (**27**) opposite a Father Psate.[261] The face of the eastern arch, above the soffit painted with John the Baptist, is adorned with encircled symbols, such as stylized crosses, triangles, floral motifs, peacocks, deer and a bust of Mary.

The painting of John the Baptist shows a full figure facing forward, with long, dark hair and a long, dark, pointed beard. He is identifiable not only by his physical appearance but by a legend written on either side of his *nimbus*. The right side of the legend is decipherable and reads βαφθισθις 'Baptist'. He is shown richly dressed, in an ornate gold and red striped robe embellished by disks. He also wears a feather patterned, collared cloak which ties at the collarbone. His face is very distinct, with a heavily creased forehead and dark lined eyes over a small mouth. His right-hand points to a floating disk on his left side which contains a ram on a red background with the *nomen sacrum* ις for Jesus, above the *Agnus Dei*. His left hand falls to his side and holds a scroll with text. Enough of the text remains to identify the passage from the Gospel of John 'Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world',[262] as we have seen at the monastery of Abu Hennes. The painting shows a combination of attributes; a scroll with the text from the Gospel of John as well as the symbol of that passage, the *Agnus Dei*. This depiction shows John the Baptist richly dressed, therefore either representative of the award awaiting ascetics in Heaven or of John's place of honour in the heavenly court.

[261] Van Loon, 'Esna Monasteries', 234-5.
[262] John 1:29.

Conclusion

Since the painted figure of John the Baptist is presented independently of any narrative framework or specific liturgical function the monastic artists were free to express their personal choice to portray John the Baptist. However, we see that there are clear patterns which emerge in regards to his specific attributes and placement which help to distinguish him, even when he is included in a large group of figures. Disciples, desert fathers, martyrs and monastic saints are at times similarly presented to each other, particularly in attire, but this is not the case for John the Baptist. His dress and position differ from those of his neighbours.

One attribute which received the most varied treatment was the camel-hair clothing mentioned in the New Testament.[263] Artists produced varied interpretations of the camel-hair and leather belt: some depictions show the camel-hair made into a cloak (**19**, **20**, **25**, **26**), in others it is a tunic (**23**) and in some the complete outfit (**22**, **24**). The garment is shown with an animal-like texture and sometimes a ragged hem. For example, in the bust of John the Baptist at Chapel XXXII at Bawit (**23**) he appears to be wearing a pelt for a tunic but at the church in the festival hall of Tuthmosis III at Karnak (**24**), he is dressed in a heavy, dark, shapeless cloak which could have been reused sackcloth. In one case, at the monastery of Matthew the Poor (**27**), John is shown dressed not as an ascetic but in splendid clothes, which differs greatly from anything resembling clothing made from a camel's hair. Perhaps this is representative of his likeness in heaven as part of the court of Christ.

One physical attribute which has shown less variability is his hair and beard which are always depicted dark and long. At times his coiffure appears wild and disheveled which is appropriate for a man who lived a purely ascetic life in the wilderness. The attributes associated with his role as first prophet and forerunner are also frequently present, appearing in all but three of the individual depictions (**20**, **21**, **25**). These attributes are the unfurled scroll with the text from the Gospel of John 'Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.',[264] and/or the visual representation of that text, the *Agnus Dei*.

[263] Matt 3:4 and Mark 1:6.
[264] John 1:29.

In terms of the placement of John the Baptist in the church space, John is often placed prominently. In the quarry church at Abu Hennes (**20**) he is shown *orans* at the center of a frieze of saints and in a second painting directly next to Christ along with his father Zechariah (**19**). At Bawit in the church of the Archangel Michel (**22**), John along with his father Zechariah are found within the apse of the east wall of the sanctuary. In Chapel XXXII at Bawit (**23**) he is on a north wall, directly opposite the sole entrance to the room, making him one of the first figures one would see upon entering the room. At the Red Monastery in Sohag (**25**), John and his father Zechariah are found in the apse of the southern dome as the two closest figures to the central Christ *logos*. As well, John the Baptist is often the only figure gesturing towards Christ, all other figures look straight forward towards the viewer.

As for the accompanying figures, in the earlier works we frequently find his father Zechariah, Mary, the disciples, and Old Testament figures with John the Baptist (**22**, **23**, **25**, **26**). Monastic fathers, saints and martyrs are also often accompanying John the Baptist, deepening his connection to ascetics and monasticism (**20**, **23**, **24**, **27**). For example, at Abu Hennes (**20**) in one of the earliest paintings, John is shown in a frieze of monastic saints. In the latest example, at the monastery of Matthew the Poor (**27**), John is opposite a father Psate, who is shown in equal proportion and refinement as John. The placement of local monastic figures, such as Psate, in proximity to John the Baptist elevates them and places them in the holiest of company. In only one painting, outside of narrative representations of the flight from Chapter 1, is John represented with his mother Elizabeth. At Abu Hennes (**21**), the infant John and his mother are shown encircled together, John is held closely by his mother in a pose more reminiscent of Mary and an infant Christ.

General Conclusion

In this study we have collected twenty-seven paintings which either depict John the Baptist or scenes from his life and analyzed them against other paintings which have a similar theme. As we have seen, these paintings were completed between the sixth and the thirteenth century and belong to the Late Antique and medieval periods. This period of art is characterized by a shift from classical, naturalistic art to the more symbolic, impressionistic art of the Late Antique and medieval period, with elements of continuity. While many works of art from this time show experimentation with perspective and creating less naturalistic images, a style which began in the fourth century, the regard for classical themes and styles did not cease. This continuity was evident through the continued use of eclectic styles and inclusion of classical motifs such as mythological figures as well as arena and hunting scenes. The early art of Christianity, which includes the wall paintings of John the Baptist, belong to this period and often display the scenes and figures of early Christianity in a Romanized context, combined with the less illusionistic execution of perspective and figures of Late Antiquity and the medieval period of art. [265]

The primary elements of the paintings which show these different styles are the execution of the figures and the use of foreground, mid-ground, and background. The paintings with more classical elements show garments painted in a manner which shows the bulk and shape of the body beneath the fabric (**6**, **7**, **8**, **9**, **10**, **11**, **12**, **13**, **14**, **17**, **18**, **23**, **26**) and classical themes such as personifications of the river Jordan (**6**, **8**). While other paintings align more with medieval, non-naturalistic, paintings where there is less of a sense of perspective and the figures are flatter with less mass (**1**, **2**, **3**, **4**, **5**, **15**, **16**, **19**, **20**, **21**, **22**, **24**, **25**, **27**). The decorations of these later scenes are generally limited to objects or architectural details painted as part of the foreground. Only a few of the narrative scenes contain mid-ground or background details such as buildings, greenery, or geological features (**1**, **2**, **3**, **4**, **5**, **6**, **8**, **9**, **10**). As we can see, the date of completion for the works of art does not necessarily reflect whether the painting will be more classically influenced or more medieval in style.

[265] J. Elsner, *The Art of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2018) 10-20.

Regardless of which style or theme the thirteen narrative, five *deesis*, and nine individual depictions of John belong to, when they are analyzed together, they show that the monastic artists and patrons considered John to be a versatile figure. He was not simply the baptizer of Christ but one who was worthy of worship and imitation in his own right and this was encouraged by later Christian works such as the *Life* of, *Panegyric*, and *Encomium* on John the Baptist. In order to fully explore how John the Baptist was depicted in the monastic art of Late Antique and medieval Egypt, we will conclude by synthesizing what we have found in our examination of the collected works. We will do this by describing the general character of the depictions of John within the different types of paintings, examining his appearance, and providing an overview of the changes which the depictions of the saint underwent over time. As we have seen, his position as a family member of Christ, as well as a prophet, baptizer and protomartyr allow his image to be used in many different ways.

When considering the paintings of John the Baptist described in the three chapters above, which have been divided by type, general comparisons can be made. The narrative, *deesis*, and individual depictions of John the Baptist show John the Baptist with only one universal commonality and that is dark coloured hair. The rest of his appearance, when it comes to clothing, general hygienic condition, hair length and beard, lacks any uniformity. The narrative paintings include John in two episodes, his flight from the massacre of the innocents and the baptism of Christ. In the paintings of the flight into the wilderness John is shown as a small child either in the arms of his mother Elizabeth (**4**, **7**) or, in the unique painting at the monastery of Paul (**13**), being carried by an angel. The earliest painting of the flight of John and Elizabeth from Abu Hennes (**4**) is very damaged and impossible to comment on, but the painting from Chapel XXX at Bawit (**7**) shows the infant John wrapped in a blanket that appears speckled, perhaps representing an animal hide. While the painting at the monastery of Paul (**13**) does not appear to have him dressed in any kind of animal skin, instead he wears a plain yellow tunic covered by a brown cloak. The portrayal of John in the scenes of the baptism (**6**, **8**, **12**) also shows variability in his depiction. In the baptism painting of Chapel XVII at Bawit, John is shown wearing a heavy thick garment (**6**). In Chapel XXX (**8**), John has short hair (and is perhaps beardless) and wears a plain tunic with a spotted cloak overtop. Finally, at el-Baramus, John has long shaggy hair and wears a heavy brown tunic covered by a light blue cloak (**12**).

In the *deesis* compositions, John is shown in one of two ways, either dressed in a tidy robe and cloak or in his ascetic camel-hair clothing. In the paintings at the monastery of Macarius (**14**) and the southern apse at the White Monastery (**15**), John is shown wearing a plain tunic with a plain robe, his hair and beard are tidy and clean. On the other hand, in the eastern dome of the White Monastery (**16**), the monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs (**17**), and at the monastery of Antony (**18**) he is shown in a more ascetic manner. At the White monastery in the eastern dome, he is represented in a rough robe, at the monastery of Ammonius and the Martyr (**17**), he wears a speckled yellow cloak, and at the monastery of Antony (**18**) a dark brown, shearling trimmed cloak; in all three his hair and beard are dark, long and untidy. The tidy appearance of John (**14**, **15**) may be an attempt to portray John as he would appear after death as a member of the court of Heaven. He would no longer be living as an ascetic in the wilderness, having received his reward for a life spent in withdrawal and sacrifice.

The individual depictions show a preference for depicting John in his role as prophet and forerunner. They indicate this by painting John either gesturing towards Christ (**25**), with the *Agnus Dei* (**23**, **26**, **27**), or with an unfurled scroll bearing the inscription from John 1:29 (**19**, **22**, **24**, **27**). These attributes do not appear in the narrative or *deesis* paintings of John the Baptist. In the majority of the individual depictions, John is shown wearing camel-hair clothing with long, dark hair and beard (**19**, **20**, **22**, **23**, **24**, **25**, **26**). The two unique images in this group are of John as an infant being held by his mother at Deir Abu Hennes (**21**) and John dressed in a resplendent costume at the monastery of Matthew the Poor (**27**). The accompanying figures in these individual depictions vary; often we see monastic saints (**20**, **23**, **24**, **26**, **27**), Old and New Testament figures (**22**, **25**, **26**) or family members (**19**, **21**, **22**, **23**, **25**) painted alongside John. The examination of the narrative, *deesis*, and individual depictions of John illustrate that no firm rules existed to depict John the Baptist. His dark hair and some semblance of a camel-hair garment are what is generally relied upon to identify John in a scene. However, when John is in an individual depiction, attributes and legends are used to distinguish him from other ascetic looking figures.

Regardless of composition type, there are some commonalities in the general character of these paintings. Outside of narrative compositions, the individual depictions of John the Baptist depict a stiff, formal and statuesque figure. John is usually shown facing the viewer, with two examples showing him as an *orans* (**17**, **20**). These paintings also depict John gesturing towards

the symbols of his role as prophet (**19**, **24**, **26**, **27**). In the *deesis* compositions, John is still shown as a statuesque figure, but his arms are shown either in *paraklesis* (**14**, **15**, **16**, **18**) or as an *orans* (**17**). Most of the individual depictions and *deesis* paintings show the full figure of John, but four of the depictions are busts (**14**, **16**, **17**, **23**). The narrative depictions of John show the figures in more movement when compared with the *deesis* or individual depictions. In the narrative scenes, John is shown either with his hands on Christ, guiding him into the water (**6**, **8**, **12**), or being carried as an infant, fleeing the massacre of the innocents (**4**, **7**, **13**).

In terms of the placement of the paintings of John the Baptist within the larger painted space of the monastic churches, John is often placed prominently. He is one of the few persons who is not only found placed near Christ but who is shown in physical contact with him (**6**, **8**, **9**, **11**, **12**). Further, John and Mary are often the only two figures shown looking or gesturing towards Christ, while the other figures in the scene look away (**14**, **15**, **16**, **18**, **25**). As well, in *deesis* compositions (**14-18**), John is shown to the right of Christ and as equal in size and placement as Mary, who stands to the left. The individual depictions of John are placed in areas of prominence such as on east walls or opposite main points of entry (**14**, **16**, **17**, **19**, **20**, **22**, **23**, **27**). A label identifying John in the *deesis* compositions does not seem to have been deemed necessary by the monastic artists, even when John is shown without any attributes or his distinct clothing (**14**, **15**).

The clothing of John the Baptist is portrayed in one of two ways; either he is represented as an ascetic, with untidy hair and wearing animal skin, or sackcloth (**6**, **8**, **12**, **16**, **17**, **18**, **19**, **20**, **22**, **23**, **24**, **25**, **26**), or he is depicted in clean robes with neatly coiffed hair as part of the court of Heaven (**14**, **15**, **27**). The variety of ways which the camel-hair clothing has been represented perhaps conveys that this material's use for clothing was not well known. In some paintings, the camel-hair is shown as a tunic, worn against the skin (**12**, **23**); in other paintings, the camel-hair is a cloak worn on top of a plain tunic (**8**, **17**, **18**, **19**, **20**, **25**, **26**). Moreover, in others, the wardrobe appears to be a single thick, untailored garment (**6**, **22**, **24**). The depictions of the thick shapeless robe could be an artist's attempt at showing clothing made from camel-hair sackcloth, since the garments look untailored as well as very heavy. Some of the vestments appear spotted (**7**, **8**, **17**), this was perhaps done to indicate that the clothing is animal hide. Others appear as a tanned hide, some even with a shearling trim (**18**, **19**, **20**, **23**, **25**, **26**). As for the leather belt, also described by

the gospels of Matthew and Mark, only five paintings have this detail preserved or depicted at all (**18**, **19**, **20**, **25**, **26**).

Whether tanned animal hide or reused sackcloth, these depictions of the camel-hair clothing suggest that the artists perceived that John had foraged his clothing from the wilderness, either from refuse in the case of sackcloth or from a deceased animal. The artists seem to agree that the garment made from camel-hair was not made by John weaving the wool or hair of the animal into cloth, but it was the result of John living off what was available to him in the wilderness. This would match well with the other known aspects of John's ascetic life, that is, his reliance on 'locusts and wild honey' to feed himself. These foods, like the camel-hair, could be simply collected and utilized without further preparation or processing.

The paintings of John exhibit characteristics of both classical and Christian art styles which evolved in a non-linear manner, as mentioned. While acknowledging the difficulty associated with expressing certainty on the evolution of the art of John the Baptist over time, some tentative observations can still be made. The earliest paintings show more similarities with classical realism. For example, hierarchical proportions are used (**6**, **8**, **15**, **16**, **17**, **18**), and the paintings include background details to impart depth to the works. The inclusion of Zechariah as an accompanying figure, painted alongside John the Baptist, or in his own narrative scene, are more common before the tenth century (**1**, **2**, **3**, **5**, **10**, **19**, **22**, **23**, **25**). Friezes focused on the early life of John (**1-5**, **7-8**), not as part of a Marian or Christological cycle, belong to the earliest group of narrative paintings. In the later paintings, narrative scenes portray the figures in states of greater movement (**11**, **12**, **13**) and with greater facial expressions (**12**, **18**). In the later works the artist begin to use heavier, black lines for the outlines of the figures as well as for contour on elements such as the wrinkles on faces (**11**, **12**, **18**, **27**). The *deesis* painting examples date exclusively to the later examples of art, from between the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. The later paintings also include depictions of John as a member of the court of Heaven (**14**, **15**, **17**) which date from the tenth to the twelfth century.

Even with the inconsistency of his wardrobe, John the Baptist is still a distinct and easily recognizable figure in monastic art. His dark, shaggy, unkempt hair combined with artist's efforts at depicting camel-hair clothing result in a figure who embodies the idealized aesthetic of how an ascetic should appear. When John's likeness is included amongst other monastic saints, who also

dress modestly, or in narrative scenes where the figure of John might be mistaken for Christ, a legend is often provided for clarity. The attributes of the unfurled scroll inscribed with the passage from John 1:29 and an image of the *Agnus Dei* are also frequently included as symbols of his role. Further, in scenes where Christ is present, John is easily identifiable as he is often near to him and is one of only two figures who are shown in physical contact with him.

The seventeen paintings of John the Baptist which depict him as an adult show how variable his appearance is in the early Christian art of Egypt. No two monastic artists have chosen to paint John in the same way. The main point of distinction appears to come from the varied interpretations of the camel-hair clothing, though the hair and beard of John are equally variable at times. Regardless of the cause for the confusion, the New Testament descriptions of John's clothing do not seem to have inspired a homogeneous image for the monastic artists. Rather, what seems to have been important for the artists was the arrangement of the figures in the different types of paintings, such as baptism scenes, *deesis* compositions, among others. With the narrative images we see repetition in the arrangement of the figures. Using the baptism as an example (**6**, **8**, **12**), we see John on the left, Christ in the center and an angel, or angels, on the right. As well, with the flight of Elizabeth and John (**4**, **7**), we see two soldiers pursuing from the left, while Elizabeth holding John, is enclosed by a mountain on the right. The *deesis* compositions show a similar rigidity (**14**-**18**), Mary on the left, Christ in the center and John on the right. As for the individual depictions, they are not referencing a particular narrative and so cannot rely on a scene or accompanying figures for identification and so here we see the use of legends and attributes applied more rigorously. However, again it is not the costume of John which is relied upon for recognition, it is more often the unfurled scroll with the text from John 1:29 and the *Agnus Dei* which are used by the artist time and again.

For the monastic viewer, the paintings of John the Baptist carried varied meaning depending on the individual, but two general categories of meaning can be inferred from this collection of paintings. The two main symbolic meanings which the monastic artist sought to highlight are the importance which comes from his primary role in the story of Christ: as his baptizer and family member as well as his role as inspiration for ascetics. When painted as a symbol for his role in the life of Christ, we find images of John participating in the baptism with John shown near to Christ. In this role his meaning for the viewer comes from his status and thus

the depictions of his involvement in the baptism of Christ and the closeness of his mother and Mary are chosen for representation (**6**, **7**, **8**, **9**, **11**, **12**). When shown in individual depictions, John's role as precursor of Christ is often alluded to; this is accomplished by the inclusion of the scroll, with the inscription from John 1:29, and the depiction of the *Agnus Dei* (**19**, **22**, **23**, **24**, **26**, **27**). The *deesis* compositions (**14**-**18**) further exemplify the worship of John for his closeness to Christ as he was chosen, along with Mary, as the ideal intercessors.

Second, John's role as the ideal ascetic is also meaningful and often alluded to, providing inspiration for those attempting to imitate him, which will help them receive their reward in Heaven. This is meaning is conveyed more subtly, through the general depiction of John; in his camel-hair vestments, with long and unkempt hair, and with the depictions of John in Heaven (**6**, **7**, **8**, **12**, **14**, **15**, **19**, **20**, **22**, **23**, **24**, **25**, **26**, **27**). As well, the narrative scenes from his early life (**1**, **2**, **3**, **4**, **5**, **7**, **9**, **10**, **11**, **13**), exemplify the trials he faced in life, fleeing and then being raised and living in the wilderness. These portrayals are evidence of the value placed on the origins of John's ascetic life by the monastic artists. These scenes and the general appearance of John point to his life of asceticism being inspirational to the monastic community.

No doubt it was the popularity of John which allowed the artist such freedom when depicting the camel-hair clothing; the artist was not bound by a narrow description of his appearance to ensure he was recognizable. The element which attracts the strictest adherence is the arrangement of figures in the compositions. The painting of narrative images from the conception and early life of John the Baptist demonstrate that the worship of John was not solely related to his titular role but also to the events and trials which preceded his time as forerunner and baptizer. The use of the paintings of John the Baptist as a study for the evolution of Egyptian monastic art reveals the complexity in attempting to assign works as Late Antique or medieval; there is no clear division in the art which certainly assigns each work to any one of these periods. The themes and styles of the paintings of John the Baptist show both change and continuity in the early representation of this biblical figure in Egypt.

Appendix 1: Catalogue of Paintings

No.	Fig. No.	Location	Publication	Date	Brief Description
Narrative Paintings					
1	1	Baptistry, Quarry Church, Monastery of Deir Abu Hennes, Antinoopolis	Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', pl. V.	6-8th c.	Scene from the life of John the Baptist: the annunciation to Zechariah.
2	1	Baptistry, Quarry Church, Monastery of Deir Abu Hennes, Antinoopolis	Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', pl. V.	6-8th c.	Scene from the life of John the Baptist: Zechariah struck dumb outside the temple.
3	1	Baptistry, Quarry Church, Monastery of Deir Abu Hennes, Antinoopolis	Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', pl. V.	6-8th c.	Scene from the life of John the Baptist: Zechariah and an unknown figure (Elizabeth?).
4	2	Narthex, Quarry Church Deir Abu Hennes, Antinoopolis	Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', pl. I.	6-8th c.	Scene from the life of John the Baptist: Elizabeth and John flee to wilderness.
5	2 and 3	Narthex, Quarry Church, Monastery of Deir Abu Hennes, Antinoopolis	Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', pl. I and II.	6-8th c.	Scene from the life of John the Baptist: Death of Zechariah.
6	4	Chapel XVII, Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit	Clédat, *Baouit* vol. 1, pl. XLV.	6-8th c.	Baptism of Christ with accompanying angel
7	5	Chapel XXX, Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit	Clédat, *Baouit*, vol. 3, Fig. 17.	6-8th c.	Scene from the life of John the Baptist: Elizabeth and John flee to wilderness.
8	6	Chapel XXX, Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit	Clédat, *Baouit*, vol. 2, pl. IV and V.	6-8th c.	Baptism of Christ with accompanying angel.
9	7	Chapel LI, Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit	Clédat, *Baouit*, vol. 3, Fig. 110 and 111.	6-8th c.	Scene from the life of John the Baptist: Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth.
10	8	Sanctuary of John the Baptist, Church of Macarius, Monastery of Macarius, Wadi el-Natrun	Evelyn White, 'Monasteries of Wadi 'n Natrun' vol. 3, pl. XXX-A.	10th to early 12th c.	Scene from the life of John the Baptist: Annunciation to Zechariah.
11	9	Nave, Church of the Holy Virgin, Deir el-Baramus, Wadi el-Natrun	Evelyn White, 'Monasteries of Wadi 'n Natrun' vol. 3, pl. LXXXII.	13th c.	Scene from the life of John the Baptist: Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth.

12	10	Nave, Church of the Holy Virgin, Deir el-Baramus, Wadi el-Natrun	Evelyn White, 'Monasteries of Wadi 'n Natrun' vol. 3, pl. LXXXII.	13th c.	Baptism of Christ with two accompanying angels.
13	11 and 12	The Cave Church of Paul, Monastery of Paul, Wadi Deir	Bolman, 'Medieval Paintings', Fig. 10.18.	1291-92	Scene from the life of John the Baptist: John the Baptist being saved from the massacre of the innocents by an angel.
Deesis Compositions					
14	13	East wall in the sanctuary of John the Baptist, Church of Macarius, Monastery of Macarius, Wadi el-Natrun	Evelyn White, 'Monasteries of Wadi 'n Natrun' vol. 3, pl. XXX-A.	10th to early 12th c.	John the Baptist and Mary shown opposite a lower central Christ with depictions of other Old and New Testament persons in narrative and figural compositions.
15	14	Apse of the southern semi-dome, Church of Shenoute, White Monastery, Sohag	Bolman, 'Medieval Flourishing', Fig. 16.17, pg. 215.	11th c.	John the Baptist opposite Mary with a central ornate cross (representing Christ) accompanied by angels.
16	15 and 16	Apse of the eastern semi-dome, Church of Shenoute, White Monastery, Sohag	Swanson, 'Eclipsed History', Fig. 15.2, pg. 194.	1123, 12th c.	Bust portraits of John the Baptist with Mary in medallions with a central Christ in Majesty, accompanied by the four creatures of the apocalypse and the evangelists.
17	17 and 18	Niche in the south haykal, North Church, Monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs, Esna	Leroy, *Peinture des couvents*, Fig. 3.	1180, 12th c.	Defaced *deesis* composition of John the Baptist and Mary in two small niches below larger Christ in Majesty.
18	19 and 20	Deesis Chapel, Church of Antony, Monastery of Antony, Hurghada	Bolman, 'Theodore', Fig. 4.38 and 4.39.	1232-33, 13th c.	John the Baptist, Mary and anthropomorphized four creatures in a *deesis* composition, painted in the apse of the *deesis* chapel with a central Christ in Majesty and accompanying angels.
Individual Depictions					
19	21	Sanctury, Quarry Church of John the Baptist, Deir Abu Hennes, Antinoopolis	Van Loon, 'Frise des saints', Fig. 12.	6-8th c.	John the Baptist opposite Zechariah with a central Christ. John holds a scroll bearing the inscription John 1:29.

20	22	Narthex, Quarry Church of John the Baptist, Deir Abu Hennes, Antinoopolis	Van Loon, 'Frise des saints', Fig. 2 and 9.	6-8th c.	John the Baptist orante in the narthex amongst a frieze of monastic saints.
21	23	Baptistry, Quarry Church of John the Baptist, Deir Abu Hennes, Antinoopolis	Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', pl. III.	6-8th c.	John the Baptist in a medallion being held by Elizabeth, left of the baptismal font.
22	24	Church of the Archangel Michel (North Church), Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit	Calament, 'Inscriptions', Fig. 603, 604, 605.	6-12th	John the Baptist on the east wall of a sanctuary opposite Zechariah. John holds a scroll bearing the inscription from John 1:29.
23	25	Chapel XXXII, Monastery of Apa Apollo, Bawit	Clédat, *Baouit*, vol. 2, pl. 8.	6-9th c.	Bust of John the Baptist in a lunette with a disk showing the *Agnus Dei*.
24	26	Church in the festival hall of Tuthmosis III, Temple of Amoun, Karnak	Munier and Pillet, 'Édifices chrétiens', Fig. 5.	7th c. or later	John the Baptist at the top of a column holding a scroll bearing the inscription from John 1:29.
25	27	Tri-conch *Basilica*, Monastery of Pshoi (Red Monastery), Sohag	Bolman, 'Iconography of Salvation', Fig.10.26.	7th-8th	John the Baptist in south apse of the triconch basilica, opposite Zechariah.
26	28	Church of Macarius, Monastery of Macarius, Wadi el-Natrun	Evelyn White, 'Monasteries of Wadi 'n Natrun' vol. 3, pl. XXIII – A.	10th to early 12th c.	John the Baptist with *Agnus Dei* accompanied by the twelve apostles and Stephen.
27	29 and 30	Church of Matthew, Monastery of Matthew the Poor, Esna	Sauneron, 'Neuvième et dixième campagnes', pl. XXVIII.	1148-9	John the Baptist on the soffit of the arch to the central sanctuary with the *Agnus Dei* and a scroll bearing the inscription from John 1:29.

Appendix 2: Figures

Fig. 1. Annunciation to Zechariah, Zechariah made mute and Zechariah with Elizabeth (?) (**1**, **2**, **3**), Deir Abu Hennes (Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', Pl. V).

Fig. 2. Massacre of the innocents, flight of Elizabeth and John, death of Zechariah (**4**, **5**), Deir Abu Hennes (Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', Pl. I).

Fig. 3. Death of Zechariah (**5**), Deir Abu Hennes (Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', Pl. II).

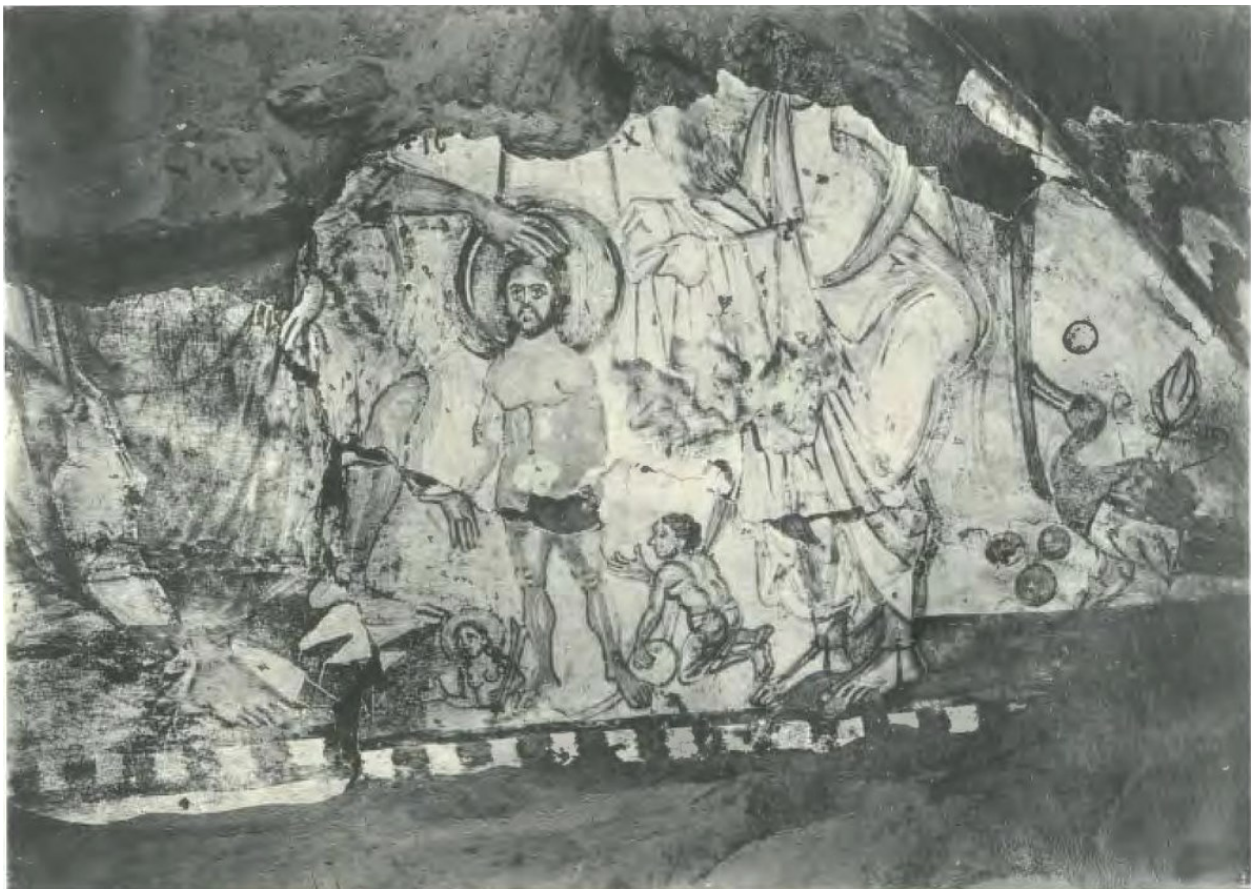

Fig. 4. Baptism of Christ, Chapel XVII - Monastery of Apa Apollo (**6**) (Clédat, Monastère et la nécropole de Baouît, vol. 1, Pl. XLV).

Fig. 5. Flight of Elizabeth and John, Chapel XXX – Monastery of Apa Apollo (**7**) (Clédat, Monastère et la nécropole de Baouît, vol. 3, Pl. 17).

Fig. 6. Baptism of Christ, Chapel XXX – Monastery of Apa Apollo (**8**) (Clédat, *Monastère et la nécropole de Baouît* 3, Pl. 18).

Fig. 7. Visitation, Chapel LI – Monastery of Apa Apollo (**9**) (Clédat, *Monastère et la nécropole de Baouît* 3, Fig. 110).

Fig. 8. Annunciation to Zechariah, Monastery of Macarius (**10**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

Fig. 9. Visitation, Deir el-Baramus (**11**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

Fig. 10. Baptism of Christ, Deir el-Baramus (**12**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

Fig. 11. Flight of John, Monastery of Paul (**13**) (Bolman, 'Medieval Paintings', Fig. 10.19).

Fig. 12. Flight of John, Monastery of Paul (**13**) (De Cesaris, Sucato, and Lyster, 'Conservation', Fig. 8.25).

Fig. 13. *Deesis*, Monastery of Macarius (**14**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

Fig. 14. *Deesis*, Southern apse, White Monastery (**15**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

Fig. 15. *Deesis*, Eastern apse, White Monastery (**16**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

Fig. 16. Close-up: *Deesis*, Eastern apse, White Monastery (**16**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

Fig. 17. *Deesis*, Monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs (**17**) (Leroy, *Peinture des couvents*, Fig. 3).

Fig. 18. *Deesis*, Monastery of Ammonius and the Martyrs (**17**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

Fig. 19. *Deesis*, Monastery of Antony (**18**) (Bolman, 'Theodore', Fig. 4.38).

Fig. 20. *Deesis*, Monastery of Antony (**18**) (Bolman, 'Theodore', Fig. 4.39).

Fig. 21, John the Baptist standing with scroll, Deir Abu Hennes (**19**) (Van Loon, 'Frise des saints', Fig. 12).

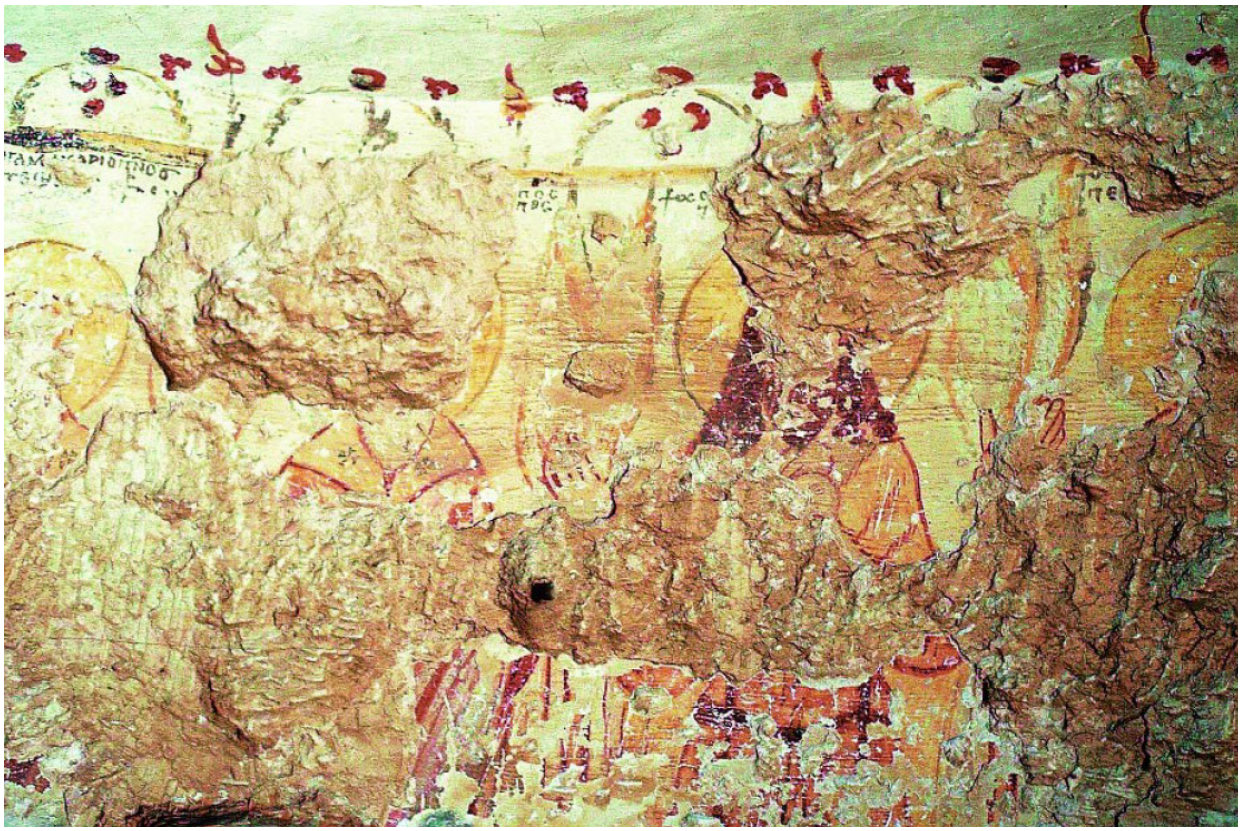

Fig. 22. John the Baptist in frieze of saints, Deir Abu Hennes (**20**) (Van Loon, 'Frise des saints', Fig. 9).

Fig. 23. Bust of John and Elizabeth, Deir Abu Hennes (**21**) (Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques', Pl. III).

Fig. 24. John the Baptist standing with scroll, Monastery Apa Apollo (**22**) (Calament, 'Inscriptions', Fig. 603).

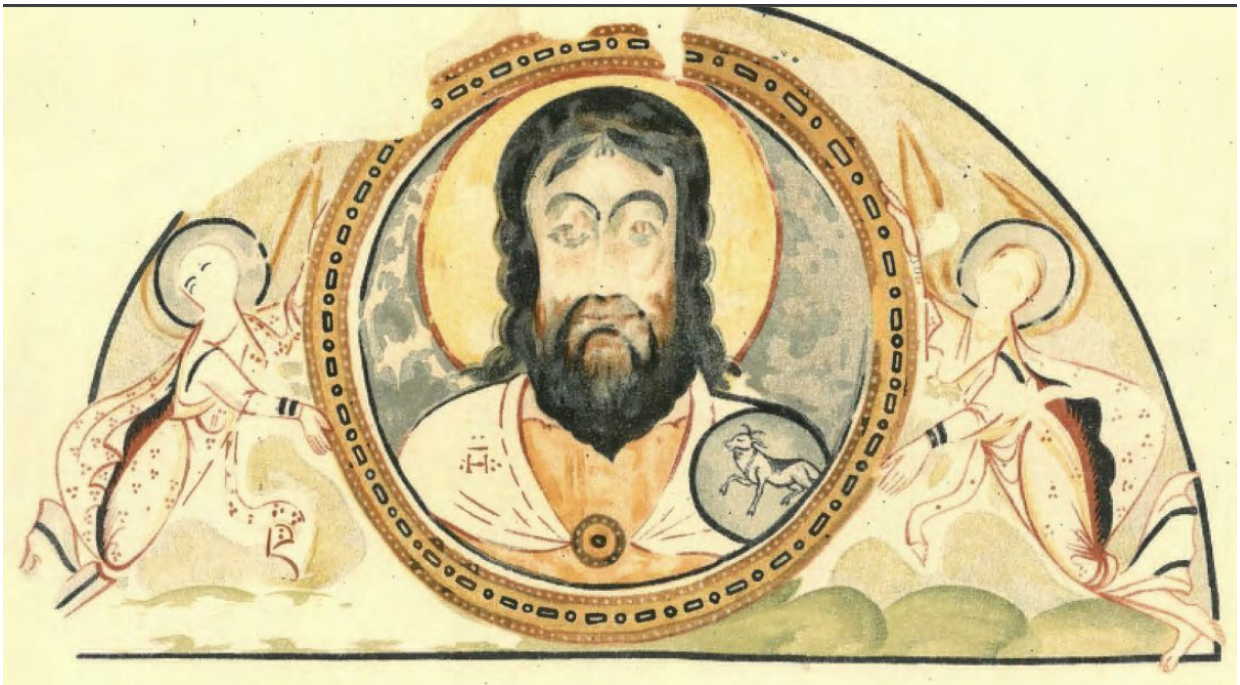

Fig. 25. Bust of John the Baptist, Chapel XXXII (**23**) (Clédat, *Monastère et nécropole de Baouît* 2, Pl. 8).

Fig. 26. John the Baptist standing with scroll, Church in the festival hall of Tuthmosis III (**24**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

Fig. 27. John the Baptist standing, Red Monastery (**25**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

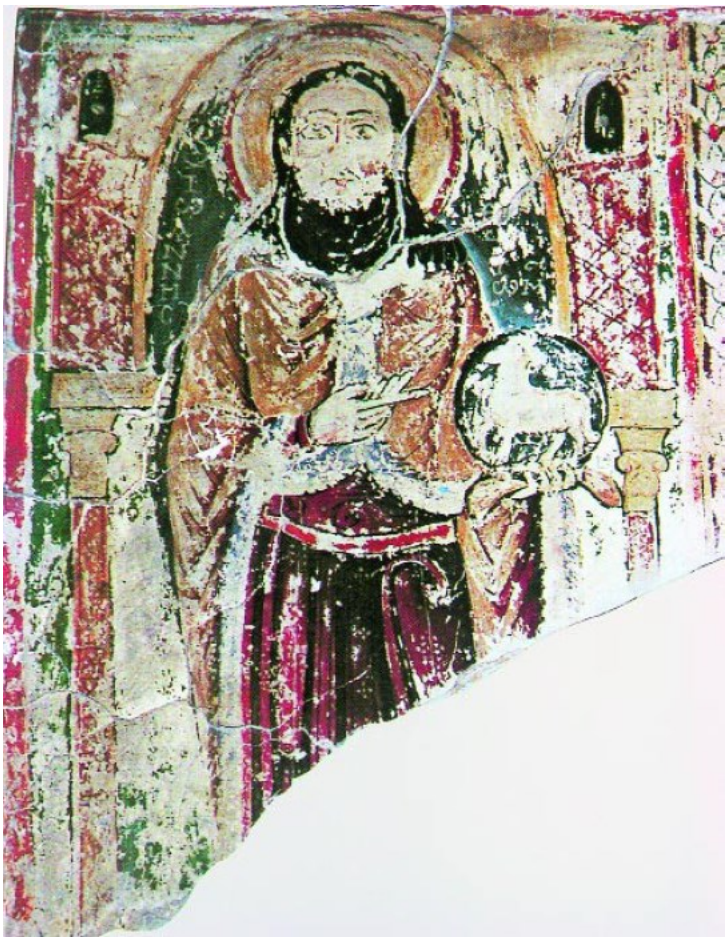

Fig. 28. John the Baptist standing with *Agnus Dei*, Monastery of Macarius (**26**) (Van Loon, 'Frise des saints', Fig. 13).

Fig. 29. John the Baptist standing with *Agnus Dei* and scroll, Monastery of Matthew the Poor (**27**) (Photo L. Duchesne).

Fig. 30. Close-up: John the Baptist standing with *Agnus Dei* and scroll, Monastery of Matthew the Poor (**27**), (Photo L. Duchesne).

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