ABSTRACT
The Coptic Graffiti Project aims to record and preserve the numerous Coptic graffiti found in Kharga Oasis. The 2005 field season surveyed and began to record graffiti found at the sites of Ain Zaf, Deir el-Bagawat, Gebel Teir, and Bagawat. In addition to the several hundred Coptic graffiti recorded this season, we found a number of Demotic graffiti in a new section of the Gebel Teir quarry.

KEY WORDS
Kharga Oasis, Coptic graffiti, Demotic, Ain Zaf, Gebel teir, Deir el-Bagawat, Bagawat

The Coptic Graffiti Project began its first field season by conducting preliminary field work at a small group of sites in Kharga Oasis. These sites include Ain Zaf, Gebel Teir and Bagawat. All of these sites are found just north of Kharga City grouped around the local hills known generally as Gebel Teir. We want to thank Mr. Amr and Mr. Mohsen of the Kharga Office (Coptic and Islamic Antiquities) and Mr. Bagat (Pharaonic Antiquities) for their continued support of this project. Our inspector in the field was Mr. Abdel Aziz Khitr who provided us with continual and substantive assistance in our day to day activities. He was also a great help in locating a number of new Coptic graffiti which we overlooked.

The aim of the project is to record, preserve, and translate the large corpus of Coptic graffiti found in a large number of sites throughout Kharga Oasis. The preliminary field season meant to visit a number of the sites and to survey the sites for Coptic graffiti. We also wished to begin the photographing of some individual graffiti and to compare them with some earlier photographs from some of the sites taken during an earlier visit in 1995. While there are numerous sites throughout Kharga Oasis with Coptic Graffiti, we are mostly planning on beginning in the northern section of the oasis and moving southwards. The one exception is the site of Ain Tafnis (80 km south of Kharga City) which we hope to record and preserve as soon as possible.

The map (Figure 1) shows the locations of the sites and their relative close relation to each other. The site of Bagawat was excavated a number of years ago by Ahmed Fakhry. The sites of Deir el Bagawat, Ain Zaf, and Ain Zaf West were cleared by the local office of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. Additional excavations to clear the remainder of Ain Zaf West are planned for the future. The area of Gebel Teir is a large multi-location quarry. No formal excavations have been undertaken at that site. The general consensus of scholars is that the ancient town of Hibis was located around the temple of Hibis and expanded towards the north slightly over time. It is clear that the cemetery for the ancient town was located just north of the temple and excavations by the local office of the SCA and by the Metropolitan Museum of Art exposed a whole series of Late period tombs in the area between Hibis and Bagawat.
Ain Zaf

The site of Ain Zaf is located approximately 3 kilometers NNW of Bagawat on the western edge of the hills of Gebel Teir. The site was cleared by the local office of the SCA and partially backfilled with clean sand to protect some of the walls. All of the structures at the site are constructed of mud brick and survive for the most part to a height of 1 meter. The walls of the “New Church” remain to about 3 meters in height. A recent guidebook gives completely erroneous information about Ain Zaf confusing it with the site of Deir el Bagawat. The site is composed of
three parts. The village extends from the plain unto the lower parts of the hill to the east and south. The central part of the village is partially excavated.

We spent most of our time in the two buildings located in the center of the site which we have named the “Old Church” and the “New Church” (Figure 2, Photograph 42). These two structures are adjacent, but both show signs of having a religious function. The New Church is a large two room structure with the remnants of a vaulted roof with an entry way to the south which is a separate large room with a square pillar. There is a bench along the west wall of this structure. We found one (1) Coptic inscription on the remains of the wall coming out of the east side of the room (labeled 12 on the figure). It is a fragment of a short prayer.

The Old Church is adjacent to this building on the west. It has a small chapel on an E-W axis with four niches in the walls (Photograph 43). The chapel walls still retain some of their plaster and it is on this plaster that we find the remains of eight (8) Coptic graffiti. All of these are fragments of texts and we have not yet made out their content. The entry room to the chapel also retains much of its plaster and we found one (1) fragmentary text on the east wall of this room. This text is completely effaced, but we are hoping that with computer enhancement we will be able to recover most of the letters and then be able to read the text. There are several rooms to the south of the chapel area on a N-S axis and there we found two (2) additional texts on the west wall. One is a short name and the other appears to be the end of a prayer (Photograph 44).

The next part of the site is called Ain Zaf East. This area consists of a single building up the
wadi to the east of the main part of the site. It is a mud brick tomb consisting of a domed room and a flat roof room (*Photograph 45*). Architecturally it is constructed in exactly the same manner as many of the private tombs found at the Coptic cemetery at Bagawat. We found the traces of one (1) small Coptic text on the wall which may be part of a name.

The third part of the site is called Ain Zaf West (*Photograph 46*). It is located about 200 meters due west of the main area of Ain Zaf. It consists of a small group of only partially excavated buildings including a church on an E-W axis. The remains of the church show that it underwent several building phases. Originally it had a flat east wall with a series of niches, but this was changed into a curved apse more typical of Coptic village churches. We found one (1) Coptic and one (1) Greek text on the north wall of the church and one (1) additional text of the south wall of the connecting room. All of the texts appear to be names. Our inspector informs us that he hopes to continue the excavation of Ain Zaf West to see more clearly the layout of the village.

In total we found fourteen (14) Coptic inscriptions and one (1) Greek inscription, mostly fragmentary, at the site of Ain Zaf.

**Deir el-Bagawat**

The site of Deir el-Bagawat is located approximately 1 kilometer NW of Bagawat. It lies near the base of the hill where the monastery of Moustafa Kachef is found (see map in Figure 1). The site appears to be some type of combination monastery and caravan way station (*Photograph 47*). The site was cleared by the local office of the SCA a number of years ago and contains a large number of rooms centered around a chapel. The main chapel has a N-S orientation with three rooms on the east side (Figure 3). The west, north and south sides of the chapel have a bench running along the entire area (*Photographs 49 and 51*).

The Coptic graffiti are found on each of the walls of the chapel and the three associated rooms. The texts were inscribed in both red dipinto and by scratching into the white-washed or plain plaster. The west wall of the chapel (*Photograph 48*) had the best preserved and longest of the inscriptions. Recently however, a section of the west wall has collapsed (*Photograph 49*) destroying a whole group of the graffiti. Thankfully, in 1995 we had taken a series of photographs of that section and we will be able to reconstruct most of what is now lost (*Photograph 50*).
The first room (Room 1) on the east is domed and has five niches and the remains of a mud brick altar in the center (Photograph 52). A few of the graffiti are painted, but most are scratched on the jambs and reveals of the door as well as around each of the niches. The second room (Room 2) is oriented N - S and has an arched roof (Photograph 53). All of the graffiti are scratched in the wall. Room 3 has three niches in its east wall (Photograph 54). As the inscriptions over the door to Room 2 and over the central niche in Room 3 mention Eirene (“Peace” personified) we are tempted to call this area the “Chapel of Peace”.

In the Main Chapel we have a large number of texts both in dipinto and scratched in the plaster. In some cases we have multiple levels of graffiti with one text painted on top of a second with other graffiti scratched on top of these. Lastly our inspector pointed out two additional dipinto graffiti he found, one in the stairwell to the roof and another in a rear room (again mentioning “Eirene”). The types of inscriptions found at Deir el-Bagawat were a combination of prayer texts, lists of names and short religious petitions. In total we recorded one hundred and eleven (111) Coptic graffiti from this site.

Gebel Teir

The area of the quarry of Gebel Teir has been known for many years. Ahmed Fakhry did the initial work in the area publishing a large number of the figures and drawings. He also transcribed some of the Coptic texts and made drawings of some of the Demotic texts. The French team of Devauchelle and Wagner published some of the Greek and Demotic texts. In 1995 Cruz-Uribe published the Demotic texts in Zones 1, 2, 3 and 4 at the quarry. From previous visits to the site, we had noted that there were a number of Coptic texts in Zones 2 and 4 of the site and it was our intent to survey and record these graffiti during this season. However, modern quarrying activity has completely destroyed the area known as Zone 2 and all of the texts in that section of the site are now lost.

This field season we concentrated on the area called Zone 4. This area is a small cave up the hill at the back of the wadi of the quarry (Figure 4). The cave is about three quarters of the way up the mountain of Gebel Teir and commands a view of all of Kharga City to the south (Photographs 55 and 56). This season we were able to discern that the cave area went through two distinct phases of use. The earlier phase coincided with the appearance of the Demotic texts, most of which are located higher up on the walls of the cave. Over time additional stone was quarried out of the cave and it was then abandoned as a quarry. We then find a series of Coptic inscriptions on a slightly lower level. We recorded a total of seventy four (74) Coptic texts in and around the cave of Zone 4. These texts are a combination of prayers, names and figures. The cave is dominated on the east wall by two figures (Photograph 57). The larger is a scene of the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus. Next to this to the left is a smaller figure labeled as Mena. Several of the Coptic texts specifically mention Apa Mena as a martyr and the presence of a number of groups of “pilgrim’s feet” suggests that this area was a local pilgrimage shrine to the Virgin Mary and to Apa Mena. The graffito of the Frenchman Ayme to the right covered an earlier dipinto text. We also found one text outside of the cave on the overhang above and to the east of the entrance (Photograph 58). This text was partially cut out of the cliff by antiquities thieves.

Our inspector, Mr. Adbel Aziz Khitr, then showed us a previously unknown area of Gebel Teir where additional inscriptions are to be found. This area, which we now call Zone 5, is located...
on the north side of the hill where the cave of Zone 4 is found (Photograph 59). If you walk around the hill, there is a branch of a wadi where we found ten (10) additional Coptic texts and as well as forty seven (47) short Demotic texts. In all cases the texts were simple names and probably represent men working in this wadi quarrying the fine limestone present at that level of the cliff.

In all we recorded a total of eighty four (84) Coptic texts at the quarry sites in Gebel Teir this season.

Figure 4 - Gebel Teir - Sketch Map of the Quarry Area (not to scale).

Bagawat

The Coptic cemetery at Bagawat is the most significant excavated Coptic cemetery in Egypt in terms of the numbers of tombs that survive, the contents of the painted decorations on a number of the tombs, as well as for the unpublished Coptic inscriptions found within the tombs (Photograph 60). The site was wonderfully excavated by Ahmed Fakhry who published the results in several articles and a book which is the definitive study of the site so far. Little work has been done on the inscriptions found in the tombs. Roquet did a preliminary study of the Coptic inscriptions, but never published the results.

There are over two hundred and thirty (230) tombs found at the site, a number of which have Coptic graffiti on them. Our work was limited to just several tombs due to our short initial field season. We thus copied inscriptions in three tombs: 80, 25, and 20 only. As our project continues we will analyze and copy the inscriptions in the remaining the tombs.

Tomb 80, located on the southern end of the necropolis, is one of only several tombs in the cemetery which has painted decorations in the plaster on the dome of the tomb. This tomb contains a series of painted figures including Adam and Eve, Abraham and Isaac, Paul and Thekla, as well as “Justice” personified. There is also a figure of Eirene (“Peace”) personified and thus the tomb
is called the “Chapel of Peace” (Photograph 61). Because the tomb is in the forefront of the cemetery and was beautifully decorated, it seems to have been a site of frequent visitors. These pilgrims covered the entire bottom walls with graffiti denoting their journey to the tomb. Westerfeld has suggested that the figure of Daniel opposite the door in the ceiling made the site a pilgrimage site for the cult of Daniel and is attested in several graffiti mentioning him in the tomb. We found a total of one hundred and thirty seven (137) individual Coptic graffiti in this tomb alone (Photograph 62). Most of these are of the “ánok (‘I am’) plus name” type of inscription.

We also began the recording of the texts in tomb 25 (Photograph 63). There is an interesting scene of the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham on the north wall of the rear chamber (Photograph 64). Thus far we recorded a total of thirty one (31) graffiti in the rear chamber and front room of the tomb (Photograph 65). We estimate an additional sixty to seventy (60-70) Coptic graffiti are still to be recorded in this tomb. Most of the texts are also of the “ánok plus name” type of inscription.

Finally we quickly looked at the small number of texts in tomb 20 (Photograph 66). One in particular was of interest. It records the adventures of two men, Panare and Psate who witnessed a robbery in the town, intervened, and then fled to the tomb where they said they spent the rest of the day in hiding (Photograph 67). While in the tomb they proceeded to carve a series of drawings of boats and crosses on the wall. It would appear that Panare was the one who could write, and he seemed to show Psate how to write his name and some other letters. Psate then proceeded to practice on one section of the north wall. It will be interesting to see what the remainder of the texts reveal when we have a chance to examine them in detail.

In conclusion, our preliminary field season of the Coptic graffiti project was most productive and we look forward to returning next year for further field work on sites within Kharga Oasis.

Sample Texts Translated

1) Text from Deir el Bagawat

Photograph: see Photograph 50.

1) ΠΝΟΥΤΕ Μ ΠΑΡΧ ///
2) ἈΓΓΕΛΟΣ ΓΑΒΡΙΗΛ
3) [Ε]ΚΑ Ρ ΟΥΝΑ ΜΝ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΣ
4) /// ΠΩΝ ΑΘΑΝΑΣΙΟΣ
5) ΠΡΜ ΤΤΟΛΙΣ ΥΜ ΤΜ ΠΕΖΟΜ ///
6) ΜΕΝΟΣ ΧΟΙΑΚ
7) ΙΓ ΙΝΔΙΚ Δ [⋯] ΠΡΩ Ζ ///

1) God of the arch-
2) angel Gabriel,
3) may you do a kindness for Georgios
4) the son of Athanasius,
5) the man of Hibis ...
6) the month of Khoiak
7) (day) 13 in the 4th indiction year [...] ... 7(?) ...

Notes
Line 1-2 L. McCoull (personal communication) noted that the invocation “God of the Archangel Gabriel” provides additional evidence for his veneration as noted in A. Papaconstantinou’s book Le Culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides. L’apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes (Paris: CNRS, 2001).

Line 3: ΕΠΕ, Π ΠΝΑ, ΟΥΝΑ “do charity, kindness” ΜΝ- (Crum, CD 217a). Bagnall translates “have mercy on.”

Line 3: According to Roquet, BSFE 76 (1976): 43, the form ΕΝΑΚΩΤΜ is the usual form for the Future III in the Coptic texts found in the tombs in Bagawat (Kharga Oasis).

Line 4: Reading the second character as Ω, not Ω. ΩΗΡΕ Ν → ΩΗΝ (Crum, CD 584a).

Line 5: What follows 2ΜΒ is problematic. If we take it as part of this text, then we would expect something along the line of 2Μ ΠΕ- “in the” going directly to line 6 and understanding a preposition followed by article and word for month. What makes that a problem is the cross before 2Μ. In that case we can make an alternate suggestion of taking everything after 2Μ as part of a separate inscription. This would allow the right side of this text to be relatively straight.

Line 6-7: The date Khoiak 13 should be December 9 in the Byzantine period.

Line 7: ΙΝΑΙΚ is one of many possible abbreviations for ΙΝΑΙΚΙΟΝ “indiction.” See for example the various writings found in Greek texts in Kharga, G. Wagner, Les oasis d’Égypte à l’époque grecque, romaine et byzantine d’après les documents grecs (Cairo: IFAO, 1987), 424.

Line 7: This whole section after “indiction” is unclear because of the erasure of an earlier graffito which overlaps this section.

Line 7: The Φ does not belong to this text. It would seem to be the first sign of a now erased inscription. This would explain why it is located between lines 6 and 7.

2) Gebel Teir Zone Four (Field #4.21)

Photograph: See Photograph 57 (located below and to the left of figure of Madonna and Child).

“Apa Appollo the elder”
“Apa Noup the elder”
“Apa Panoute”

Line 1 - 2: Fakhry read ΝΟϹ.

Line 2: ΝΟΥΠ is probably to be seen as a shortened form of ΔΝΟΥΠ, M. Hasitzka, Namen in Koptischen dokumentarischen Texte (2004), 11 and 59.

3) Bagawat - Tomb 80 (Field Number 80 North 28, 30, 33)
Photograph: Photograph 62.

ΔΝΟΚ ΔΑΝΙΗΛ ΔΝΟΚ ΠΕΣΧΑΤΕ ΠΕΤΡΟΣΟΝΤΑΝΝΕ
ΜΜΩΥ

“I am Daniel the son of Mou[ses].”
“I am Peshate.”
“Petros the one of Tanne.”

For the name ΤΑΝΝΑ see Hasitzka, Namen, 88.

4) Bagawat - Tomb 25 - West Corridor - South Side
Photograph: Photograph 65 and Roquet, BSFE 76 (1976): 36, fig. 3.

ΔΝΟΚ ΙΩΣΗΠ ΠΕΡ Ν ΒΙΚΤΩΡ ΠΡΜ ΤΑ- ΚΡΚΕ ΨΛΗΛΑ ΔΧ[ΟΙ] Ν ΑΓΑΠΗ ΙΧΧΧ

“I am Josep the son of Victor the man of Ta- kerke. Pray for [me]
in the love of Jesus Christ.”

Line 2-3: ΤΑΚΡΚΕ. Roquet, BSFE 76 (1976): 36-37, takes as the toponym “Girga” = “Dayr Abu Ghanaym”, a town in the Nile valley. This would suggest that this is an inscription of a visitor to the oasis.
Line 3: άκ[ο1]. There are traces of one or two letters after the άκ.

5) Bagawat - Tomb 20 - North Wall - Field #1
Photograph: Photograph 67.
Bibliography: Fakhry, Bagawat, 113.

ἀνόκ ΠΑΝΑΡΕ
ΜΝ ΨΑΤΕ ΤΑΝ ἀλ-
εί εἰςοῦν ἐ π?μα ἐπιήτ ἐτβε ἀπορρε
xea τίῳκε νκον ἐτβε παλασρακ ἄν
τίμε τε ταντεσαχ εξχιογε ἀπόσο
ἀντ ερο ρητο ἀνπογυζοου
ζμ πι<α>μά

“I, Panare,
together with Psate: We visited
this(?) place, fleeing on account of Aporre,
since he is pursuing us on account of this hostility of (in) the
towns (?) , since we caught him stealing from the garden.
We beat him and we fled. We spent a day
in this place.”

Line 2-3: Not read by Fakhry, Bagawat, 113. Taking καλας as a writing of κο(ε)ιας κο as “to visit” (Crum, CD 808a). The καλ at the end of line 2 was found during collation and does seem to be part of this text; the handwriting is entirely consistent and the placement at the far right of the line can be explained as an attempt to “wrap” the text around the large cross above.

Line 3: Fakhry read πζ?μα. There is what appears to be a cryptogram of sorts preceding the word μα. Basically it looks like a π with a cross above it, followed by a quartered circle. One would expect a form of the demonstrative at this point. Could this writing be intended to convey the notion that “this” was in fact a sacred place? We have not found parallels to this so far.

Line 3: Fakhry read απορ?θ. Compare Preisigke, Namenbuch, 42: the name απορ is attested in a single Coptic MS.

Line 4: Greek διωκω, “to hasten, persecute, drive away, pursue.” The vertical stroke through the ε is not ι but simply a gash in the wall. Compare the writing ει in line 3.

Line 4: παλασρακ. We have tentatively taken this as the demonstrative πα followed by a compound word λας + ρακ. The literal meaning would be something like “language/tongue of enmity/hostility”. For the meaning of “enmity, hostility” (of an enemy) see Gardiner, Admonitions, 107. For the construction of λας plus word compare to λαςκαναλ “duplicity” (literally: “tongue of a fellow”), Vycichl, DELC, 99. The ρακ at the end of the line would be the genitive and plural
definite article, respectively.

Line 5: ΕΥΧΙΟΥΕ Α-. Fakhry omits ΕΥ. Α for Ε (Achmimic/Sub-achmimic form); the sense of “from” is among the many possible meanings of the preposition (Crum, CD 50b).

Line 5: χωμ, from χωμ, “garden, vineyard, property” (Crum, CD 817b).

Line 6: ΑΝΠΟΥΣΟΟΥ. Fakhry read ΑΝΠΟΥΣΟΟ.".

Line 7: Μ ΠΙ<Λ>ΜΑ. Fakhry read ΜΠΙΛΛΛΑ. ΠΙΛΛΑ appears to have been corrected to ΠΙΜΛΑ; compare the correction of ΥΑΤΑ to ΥΑΤΕ in line 2. Fakhry’s reading of ΠΙΛΛΑ is most unlikely.

NOTES

1. C. Vivian, The Western Desert of Egypt (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 78-79. The map labels the site as Deir Mustafa Kachef.

2. In the original discussion of the area by W. Müller-Wiener, “Christliche Monumente im Gebiet von Hibis (el-Kharga),” MDAIK 19 (1963): 122, the site was simply called “unexcavated mud brick ruins”.

3. The main text of the inscription was partially published by R. Bagnall, “A Coptic Graffito From the Valley Building At Deir Mustafa Kashef,” in T. Gagos & R. Bagnall, eds., Essays and Texts in Honor of J. David Thomas (Atlanta: ASP, 2001): 263. A color photograph of this section also appears in J. Willeitner, Die ägyptischen Oasen (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 2003): 36. We have translated and discussed the text below (pp. 43-44).

4. J. Ball, Kharga Oasis : its topography and geology (Cairo: National Printing Department, 1900).


8. Towards the rear of the cave the Demotic and Coptic texts overlap suggesting that only the front half of the cave was quarried down. The cave has not been cleared of sand and debris so this is only conjecture.


14. A diagram of tombs 25, 26 and 27 can be seen in S. Atiya, ed., *A Coptic Encyclopedia*, 328. It is the tomb on the right portion of the drawing.