

Title: Late Antique Christianity in Kharga Oasis (Egypt). An Archaeological Examination

Kharga Oasis is the southernmost of the five oases of Egypt's Western Desert, and it is home to a late antique archaeological record of unparalleled quality. The value of this material is particularly apparent with regards to late antique Christianity, the region containing one of if not *the* largest corpuses of early Christian material culture in the world. This is not due to Christian communities here having been any larger or more extravagant than elsewhere in the Roman Empire, but is simply an accident of preservation, resulting from the aridity for which Egypt is renowned, the history of occupation in the region, and the activities of early archaeologists. Such a corpus offers unique insight into the real, lived realities of some of the first adherents of Christianity in Egypt. This is in contrast to the idealised image of early Egyptian Christianity provided by the literary sources.

Despite the extent and quality of the oasean corpus, it has never before been studied as a comprehensive whole. This is in part due to the fact that a large amount of the relevant material has not yet been published. I have been fortunate enough to have access to this material, and the current work is thus the first large-scale study dedicated to late antique Christianity in Kharga Oasis. It does not claim to be complete, however. The sheer quantity of the sources and the various constraints of a doctoral thesis means that many topics have been subject to only surface-level examination, while a plethora of valuable topics have been left unexplored. In presenting this little-known corpus to the scholarly community, the current work is intended as a springboard for future studies dedicated to late antique Christianity.