

ABUQIR (Canopus)

A city located on the northern coast of the western Delta, 15 miles (24 km) northeast of Alexandria. The village's name is an abbreviated Arabic form of the name of the Coptic saint Apa Cyrus, who taught [Christianity](#) in this area in the third century and was buried there after his death.



Map of Northern Egypt with the sunken cities of Herakleion, Canopus and menouthis

Near Abuqir is the ancient city known in Egyptian as Per-gwati and in Greek as Canopus, after the pilot of Menelaus, the Trojan War hero. Canopus is said to have died and been buried at this place in Egypt.

Canopus, one of the most famous centers of [pagan](#) religion in ancient Egypt, is mentioned frequently in classical authors, papyri, and inscriptions. From these sources, we know a great deal about the religion, mythology, and history of the region.



Ptolemaic coins from the submerged Heracleion

The strength of the city's devotion to the Egyptian god Serapis made it difficult for [Christianity](#) to gain a foothold in the area. In 312 Athanasia and her daughters Theopiste, Theodora, and Theodoxia were imprisoned in Canopus because of their Christian faith. Cyrus and John, who journeyed to the city to strengthen the prisoners, suffered martyrdom together with them (Holweck, 1969, pp. 257-58). Holweck indicates that Canopus was more [pagan](#) than Christian in the early fourth century. *RUFINUS (Historia ecclesiastica 2.26-27)* relates that in his day (second half of the fourth century) Serapis still held sway in Canopus.

Eunapius says that Patriarch THEOPHILUS (385-412), acting under the aegis of the emperor Theodosius and with the support of the [prefect](#) Evagrius and strategus Romanus, went to Canopus and Alexandria, destroyed the Serapeum in each city, and established monks in its place (1922, pp. 418-24). Jerome relates that monks from the monasteries of PACHOMIUS settled in Canopus and followed the [Pachomian](#) rule. For the many Latin-speaking visitors and monks who were drawn to this monastery, Jerome translated the rules of Pachomius, THEODORUS OF ALEXANDRIA, and HORSIESIOS. In order to avoid the [pagan](#) associations evoked by the name Canopus, the monks changed the name of their [dwelling](#) to [Monastery of the METANOIA ARSENIUS OF SCETIS AND TURAH](#), the renowned father of monks, spent three years in this monastery (*Apophthegmata Patrum*, nos. 66, 80).

The [Monastery of the Metanoia](#) was one of the few monasteries to avoid destruction by the Persians around 618, but from the ninth century on no source mentions the monastery or any other Christian buildings in Abuqir and no traces of their ruins have been found. In 1935 a new Coptic [church](#) of Cyrus and John in Abuqir was dedicated (Muyser, 1979, pp. 6-7).

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RANDALL [STEWART](#)

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