

DAYR AL-MUHARRAQ □□□□□□ □□□□□□

Nothing is known for certain about the date of the foundation of this monastery. A sermon attributed to the patriarch THEOPHILUS OF ALEXANDRIA (384-412) credits him with a vision of the Holy Virgin in which she revealed to him that the principal church of the monastery in the place where Mary and her son sojourned during their flight from Herod was consecrated by Jesus himself, assisted by his disciples.

Guidi (1917) has published the Oriental versions. The Arabic text is also given in a work entitled *Al-La'ali'* (1966, pp. 56-70). A reworking of this sermon is attributed to Zechariah, bishop of Sakha at the beginning of the eighth century (pp. 40-55).

The monastery is said to have been founded by Saint PACHOMIUS (Simaykah, 1932, Vol. 2, p. 121), but the Lives of Pachomius, both Greek and Coptic, do not speak of it. The most ancient source appears to be the HISTORY OF THE [PATRIARCHS](#) of the Egyptian church, which in its list of the places where the Holy Virgin stayed with Jesus in Egypt names Qusqam, but not Dayr al-Muharraq.

The clearest source is without doubt ABU SALIH THE ARMENIAN from the beginning of the thirteenth century (1895, pp. 224-27). He knew the [legend](#) of the Holy Family's FLIGHT INTO EGYPT and of the consecration of this church, but he never spoke of a monastery. The SYNAXARION recalls these events at 6 Hatur. The recension of the Synaxarion from Upper Egypt names the Dayr al-Muharraq in the notice of the martyr Elias, bishop of this monastery and of al-Qusiyyah (20 Kiyahk).

The Ethiopian Synaxarion also mentions the monastery at Qusqam at 24 Bashans (Feast of the Coming of Jesus into Egypt), which the Arabic Synaxarion of the [Copts](#) does not do (Budge, 1928, Vol. 3, p. 926). A

[manuscript](#) of the Synaxarion deriving from the library of the Dayr al-Muharraq indicates the feast of the *qummu*s 'Abd al-Malak on 18 Babah. This saint built or restored the Church of Saint George. He lived in the Arab period, prior to the date of the manuscript (1867, according to Troupeau, 1974, Vol. 2, p. 30).

In 1305 Marqus, bishop of Qusqam, was present at the preparation of the chrism (Munier, 1943, p. 37), and in another [manuscript](#) about the same event, Marqus is called bishop of al-Qusiyyah. Since the monastery is only a little over 4 miles (7 km) from this town, he was probably bishop of these two places (Muyser, 1945, p. 158).

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, several monks of Dayr al-Muharraq became [patriarchs](#) of Alexandria: in 1370 GABRIEL, in 1378 MATTHEW I, in 1452 MATTHEW II, and in 1484 JOHN XIII.

In 1396 a miracle of the Holy Virgin took place in the monastery, recounted by the Ethiopic *Book of the Miracles of Mary* (Cerulli, 1943, p. 209). In addition, this text shows that there were fairly close relations at this period between the monks of Saint Antony and those of al-Muharraq.

Before 1441, al-MAQRIZI mentioned Dayr al-Muharraq (1853, Vol. 2, p. 506). He was familiar with the [legend](#) of the Holy Family's sojourn, and noted that this was a place of pilgrimage twice a year, on Palm Sunday and at the feast of Pentecost.

In 1597, the *qummu*s Gabriel was one of the envoys of the patriarch GABRIEL VIII to Pope [Clement VIII](#) to seal the union of the Coptic church with the Roman church (Buri, 1931; Graf, 1951, Vol. 4, p. 122). In 1668 two Capuchins, Protais and François, said that the monastery was inhabited by the Abyssinians and spoke of the Holy Family's sojourn (Sauneron, 1969, p. 141). The Dominican J. VANSLEB noted on the west bank of the Nile the monasteries of Muharraq and of the Abyssinians nearby. Jomard, in the *Description d'Egypte* (Vol. 4, p. 301), noted that there were twenty religious and two hundred inhabitants.

In the nineteenth century, the number of monks having decreased, a secular [priest](#) from al-Qusiyyah came to the monastery to perform the offices. Gradually prosperity returned. A description of the modern state of the site was given by O. Meinardus.

The presence of the Ethiopian monks is attested from the thirteenth century (and perhaps earlier) by the Ethiopic manuscripts deriving from it. Among them, one should note in the [Catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale](#) (Paris), by Zotenberg, nos. 32, 35, 42, and 52. It does, indeed, seem from these manuscripts that the community of Qusqam formed a single unit with that of HARIT ZUWAYLAH and that of Jerusalem. The monastery served as a staging post for the Ethiopian monks on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It is not known what bond united this community with the other groups of Ethiopian monks established in Egypt, in particular at SCETIS and at Saint Antony (DAYR ANBA ANTUNIYUS).

The interior of the keep with the Chapel of the Archangel Michael with a wooden lectern.

The interior of the keep with the Chapel of the Archangel Michael with a wooden lectern.

The Ark or Throne of the Chalice (Kursi al-kas). During liturgy, the prepared chalice is put in the Ark until Holy Communion. The icon

painter A[na]stasi al-Qudsi al-[Rumi](#) decorated the Ark with The Last Supper (photograph), the Virgin and Child and the archangels Michael and Gabriel (dated am 1581/ad 1864-1865).

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Fig. 26.3. Qusqam, selected ornamental carvings on the outside walls of the keep. Photographs by Fr. Maximous al-Muharraqi.

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Fig. 26.2. Qusqam, two iconostases in the ancient Church of the Holy Virgin Mary. Photograph by Fr. Maximous al-Muharraqi.

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The ancient Church of the Virgin Mary, view from the nave to the sanctuary. According to tradition, Christ consecrated the house ivhere the family lived during their stay in Egypt as a church, the first church in Egypt. The present building most probably dates to the twelfth century. The ancient Church of the Virgin Mary, view from the nave to the sanctuary. According to tradition, Christ consecrated the house ivhere the family lived during their stay in Egypt as a church, the first church in Egypt. The present building most probably dates to the twelfth century.

The ancient Church of the Virgin Mary, the central altar room.
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The reused columns were placed upside down. RIGHT: the well on the ground floor of the keep.

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Fig. 26.1. Qusqam, the archaeological area. Photograph by Fr. Maximous al-Muharraqi.

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Fig. 26.6. Qusqam, selected collection of antiquities. Photographs by Fr. Maximous al-Muharraqi.

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Fig. 26.4. Qusqam, marble iconostasis of St. George Church. Photograph by Fr. Maximous al-Muharraqi.

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The Quarry Church of the Virgin.
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The interior of the keep with the Chapel of the Archangel Michael with a wooden lectern.

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The main gate of the monastery.
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Fig. 26.5. Anba Abram, bishop of the Fayoum and Giza (left); St. Hegomen Mikhail al-Buhairi al-Muharraqi (right). Photograph by Fr. Maximous al-Muharraqi.

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Hegomen Mikhail al-Buhairi al-Muharraqi (right). Photograph by Fr. Maximous al-Muharraqi.

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The Capuchins Protais and François wrote simply in 1668 that the Dayr al-Muharraq was inhabited by the Abyssinians (Sauneron, 1969, p. 141). Vansleb noted their presence in 1673 alongside Dayr al-Muharraq (1677, p. 361; 1678, p. 217). He also called it the Monastery of Saints Peter and Paul (Quatremère, 1812, p. 15). In the Ethiopic manuscripts this monastery of the [Ethiopians](#) is called the Monastery of the Apostles. In 1716 the Jesuit C. [Sicard](#) spoke of it as being in ruins (1982, Vol. 1, pp. 10-11). The monastery of the Abyssinians has disappeared, but around 1950, several Ethiopian monks were still living at the Dayr al-Muharraq.

On the links between the Dayr al-Muharraq and the Ethiopian church, reference may be made to Crawford (1958, pp. 121ff.).

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Videos (In Arabic):

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3stBXzGgui4>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y63PeAzsQdo>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VJ3SswPWS8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxLzvYPrX9s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnTy5EdDq2o>

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