

DAYR AL-ZAWIYAH

The village today called al-Zawiyah is situated about 3 miles (5 km) from Rifah and 9 miles (15 km) from ASYUT on the edge of the desert. The monastery is south of the village. An ancient cemetery borders the village to the east in the desert, where one finds Roman pottery. W. M. F. Petrie (1907, p. 2) concluded that al-Zawiyah must have been an ancient Roman fort. M. Ramzi (1953-1968, Vol. 2, pt. 4, p. 27) said that this village was formerly called Minsha'at al-Shaykh. ABU SALIH THE ARMENIAN, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, did not seem to know it. Two centuries later al-MAQRIZI (1853, Vol. 2, p. 506), speaking of the Monastery of the [Apostles](#) in the district of Durunkah, noted that this village built beside it was called Minshu'at al-Shaykh because a *shaykh* named Abu Bakr al-Shadhli had founded the village and established a garden there.

The *dayr* itself is formed of a vast quadrilateral about 90 by 110 yards (80 by 100 m) bounded by an encircling wall with a very pronounced batter. The entrance is to the west, with stone uprights, a reused lintel, and a heavy door edged with iron. Inside, a village has replaced the monks. All that survives of the ancient *dayr* is the church, which is at a lower level. It contains a transverse vaulted narthex and a nave in which four massive columns (undoubtedly enclosing more slender columns, the capitals of which can be seen) support a high dome, while the aisles are simply ceiled. In the apse, the niches on the second register have a broken pediment, as at Dayr al-Ahmar (DAYR ANBA BISHOI) in Suhaj.

Four have conches, the fifth, which occupies the center, presents a sculpted column. In the first register, three arcades with semicircular arches and two arched doorways give access to chapels. The pediments, the arcades, and the bands that separate them are finely sculpted. Everything recalls the great churches of the monasteries of Suhaj, [DAYR ANBA SHINUDAH](#) and Dayr Anba Bishoi. One may reasonably conclude

that this church of al-Zawiyah dates from the same period as those of Suhaj.

VANSLEB said that this church was called [Sauwie](#) and was dedicated to [Saint Athanasius](#) but that it presented no trace of antiquity (1677, pp. 364, 378; 1678, pp. 219, 227). M. Jullien saw it in dilapidated condition (1901, pp. 214-15), which explains why neither V. de Bock nor S. Clarke showed any interest in it. O. Meinardus (1965, p. 286; 1977, p. 397) ignored the *dayr* and spoke only of the church of the village, dedicated to the healing saint Abu Tarbu. The church of the *dayr* merits an architectural study.

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