

DAYR APA ISHAQ (Isna)

A little to the north of the present DAYR AL-SHUHADA' (Monastery of the Martyrs) at [Isna](#) are some ruins that the inhabitants call the Monastery of Apa Ishaq (Isaac). In the "new" church, which according to the inscriptions dates at least from the end of the twelfth century, an inscription commemorates the *nanasia* (church?) of Apa Ishaq the anchorite (Coquin, 1975, pp. 247-51).

We propose the following hypothesis about this inscription: When Apa Ishaq's hermitage fell into ruin, a church was built adjacent to the north of the Church of the [Martyrs](#) dedicated to Apa Ishaq, whose hermitage, a place of pilgrimage, was in ruins. Some distorted Greek word is hidden behind this word *nanasia*, perhaps simply the Greco-Coptic word *ecclesia*. However that may be, we may suppose that the hermitage of this holy personage survived in the form of a second church added to the first one "of the martyrs."

It is more difficult to know to what period this foundation of Dayr Apa Ishaq goes back. This hermitage is mentioned in the panegyric of John (Khater, 1981, pp. 17 [text] and 23 [trans.]). We prefer this name to that of Paul, for it is attested in the oldest manuscripts. This text is preserved by several manuscripts of which the oldest dates from 1520 (Khater, 1981, p. 6), but some authors write that this author could be of the thirteenth century (Sbath, 1938-1940, p. 74, no. 606). It follows that the Dayr Apa Ishaq could be older than that period.

We must also mention the panegyric attributed to a [bishop](#) of [Isna](#) called Dorotheus and preserved in an Arabic version in two manuscripts (unpublished). This author would be of the fourth century, but he does not speak at all of a hermitage of Apa Ishaq nor of a [pilgrimage](#) to this sanctuary. One must conclude that this small monastery did not exist when Dorotheus delivered his sermon in honor of Ammonius, his predecessor in the see of Isna.

We must add that the recension of the SYNAXARION from Upper Egypt, in its notice concerning Saint Ammonius and the [martyrs](#) of [Isna](#) on 13 Kiyahk, also mentions Dayr Apa Ishaq, but one cannot date this recension with any precision (perhaps twelfth to thirteenth century), and we do not know what [sources](#) the author used.

One may conclude from this evidence that Dayr Apa Ishaq was founded and frequented after the fourth century, but had fallen into ruin after the twelfth. A photo of these ruins is given by L. T. Lefort (1939, pl. 14).

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