

DAYR ASFAL AL-ARD

The most detailed description of this convent near Alexandria is given by Abu al-Makarim (1984, pp. 161, 168). He indicates that this monastery was situated east of the town and bore the name of Saint Mark. It was extensive, surrounded by gardens and cultivated land, and had no fewer than four keeps. In its underground church there were two altars where Saint Mark was commemorated. Many [relics](#) were preserved there, including those of Saint Sophia and her three daughters. After the [Council](#) of Chalcedon in 451, the church returned to the Melchites with Saint Mark's body, while the saint's head was assigned to the Copts with Saint Mark's church, called al-Qamhah, also situated outside the town.

The geographical situation of this Dayr Asfal-al-Ard is again specified by Abu al- Makarim: "it is related that it used to be the house of the oxen, where Saint Mark was martyred and from which he was dragged, attached by the feet, through the whole town." This monastery must therefore be near, if not in the same place as, the martyrrium of Saint Mark, which was situated near the sea and which was burned by 'Amr ibn al-'A s on the second capitulation of the town in 646 (Butler, 1978, p. 475).

The recension of the SYNAXARION from Lower Egypt, in the account of Benjamin on 8 Tubah, adds an interesting detail to the text of the HISTORY OF THE PATRIARCHS: " 'Amr ibn al-'A s burned many churches, among others that of Saint Mark at the sea side, known today under the name of the lowland church" ([Kanifat](#) Asfal al-Ard). This formula "known today under the name of the lowland church," added by the author of the Synaxarion, confirms Abu al- Makarim's note on the topographical situation of the convent that bears the same name.

It is very probable that it refers to the same monastery as the one described by [Bernard](#) the Wise toward 870 (see MONASTERIES IN AND AROUND ALEXANDRIA). The church of al-Qamhah, for its part, after

being rebuilt either by Patriarch AGATHON or by John of Samannud (Chaîne, 1924), was destroyed in 1218, when the Crusaders, led by Jean de Brienne, threatened Alexandria. The Ayyubid sultan al- 'Adil Ayyub ibn Abu Bakr had it demolished for fear that the Franks would use it as a fortress (al- Qalqashandi, 1922-1923, p. 134).

It is not known where this Church of Saint Mark [al-Qamhah](#) was located —perhaps it is the same as the one placed by the Synaxarion (4 Abib) to the south of the town. But the edition of the Synaxarion from Lower Egypt, which is certainly later than 1218, shows from its text that the two sites must be distinguished. The Church of Saint Mark called [al-Qamhah](#) was destroyed by 1218, and the Church of Saint Mark called Asfal al- Ard, with the neighboring convent of the same name, was still in existence at the time when the editor of the Synaxarion was writing.

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