

The Monastery of al-Ganadla (ASYUT)

THE MONASTERY OF AL-GANADLA, also called the Monastery of the Virgin (Dayr al-'Adra), was established in pharaonic quarries to the west of the village of al-Ganadla, about 25 kilometers south of Asyut. It is often confused with the Monastery of St. Macrobius (Dayr Abu Maqrufa), a nearby laura dedicated to the sixth-century hermit St. Macrobius (Abu Maqrufa).

The Monastery of al-Ganadla has two churches, one from the nineteenth century, and an older church dedicated to [the Virgin](#) Mary. A narrow corridor, through which the visitor enters a doorway to the southern part of the old church, separates the houses of worship. The naos is formed by the irregular shape of a quarry with the ceiling highest in the central part.

At the wide former entrance to the quarry, an [apse](#) was [constructed](#) with a small room to the north. The brickwork of the sanctuary dates from the nineteenth century, but the quarry was used as a church during earlier times. The [altar](#) screen was built of masonry and reused pieces of sculpture, [decorative](#) borders, and stelae. Their provenance is unknown, but they probably date to the time of the original church.

Niches were cut in all walls of the quarry. They have beautiful conches and a gable-shaped upper part, reminiscent of the niches in the churches of the [monasteries](#) in Sohag (see pages 278-89). As in the church of the Monastery of St. Pshai (Red Monastery), all architectural elements of the niches, the walls, and the ceiling were painted, probably in the sixth century. The [interiors](#) of the niches were decorated with crosses set with gemstones (not one is alike) and inscriptions of the names of Christ as Savior through the cross.

Ornamental borders, gemstone crosses, branches, and leaves in various

patterns decorate the walls. The ceiling was painted with a cassette pattern filled with [decorative](#) motifs and a series of similar crosses in medallions. The upper part of the walls, along the high ceiling, presents a series of unique paintings: canopies (a domed roof resting on columns) with plant motifs in between. Curtains, drawn back, hang between the columns, revealing a vase or a cross. The architecture of the niches with painted crosses inside them seems to be repeated in paint on the walls.

The early murals were plastered over in the eleventh or twelfth century and repainted, this time with a series of saints, angels, and, on the north wall, The Communion of the Apostles: Christ, standing behind the [altar](#) as a priest, is distributing bread and wine to his disciples. These paintings were, unfortunately, inexpertly restored, [suffering](#) great loss of detail. Although damaged, the [extraordinary](#) quality of the murals of the earlier layer is still discernible.



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The [altar](#) screen of the main haykal, [constructed](#) of reused sculpture.

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The upper part of the east wall: fragments of a series of canopies of the first layer and two saints of the second layer of paintings.

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The ceiling with the cassette pattern.

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The west wall. Fragments of saints of the second layer show in the upper part. All other decoration belongs to the older layer.

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The north wall. In the upper part is the mural of The Communion of the Apostles.

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