

The Monastery at Qubbat al-Hawwa (ASWAN)

SOME SIX KILOMETERS NORTH of the Monastery of St. Hatre (Hedra), [pharaonic](#) tombs for the governors of Aswan were cut into the cliff. Around these tombs, the monastic settlement of Qubbat al-Hawwa developed. It is named after the tomb of a shaykh who was buried nearby. The original name of the monastery is unknown.

In the early [Christian](#) period, hermits used these tombs for dwellings and they installed a church in the Tomb of Khune, probably in the sixth or seventh century. During the eleventh to twelfth centuries, the settlement expanded in the same way as St. Hatre. A staircase connected two natural terraces. Residential buildings, a refectory and utility rooms were [constructed](#) on the upper terrace and a new church was built on the lower terrace, outside the Tomb of Khune. It was enlarged at a later stage. The layout of the church is still traceable and is similar in plan to the Church of St. Hatre.

Only the western part of the second building stage has been preserved. It contains a large niche with a semi-dome (a peculiarity of the Aswan churches) that is decorated with a bust of Christ in a [mandorla](#) carried by angels. In the lower zone, the twelve apostles surround [the Virgin](#) Mary. A graffito in the niche contains the date 1125 and makes clear that these murals were painted before that date. On the wall to the right, the west wall of a [rectangular](#) room or corridor, six standing figures were painted; five of these have a rectangular number. Their identity is unknown.

The choice of themes, the use of a [rectangular](#) nimbus, and other aspects of the paintings, as well as the architecture, inscriptions and graffiti (in Coptic and Arabic) still await an extensive study.



View of the Monastery at Qubbat al-Hawwa from the Nile.

View of the Monastery at Qubbat al-Hawwa from the Nile.



The niche in the west wall with the painting of Christ in mandorla, carried by [angels](#) in the semi-dome, and [the Virgin Mary](#) and the apostles below.

To the right, the row of figures with [rectangular](#) nimbi.

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