

MONASTERIES OF THE WESTERN DESERT

In the western desert, also called the Libyan massif because it is near Libya, the oases are numerous and well known. Since the watering places and the frequency of the caravans provided regular provisioning, the monastic centers were numerous here.

It is convenient to distinguish first of all the “great” oasis, the one today called Kharjah (the outer), the largest and the best connected to the [Nile](#) Valley by a road starting from Asyut. Here were several hermit centers, first on the edge of the depression, to the west, the Dayr al-Ghanayim, then toward the second oasis, that of Dakhlah (the inner), ‘AYN ‘AMUR, still on the edge of the depression. To the northwest of the capital of Khargah, not far from the Christian necropolis of al-Bagawat, is the DAYR MUSTAFA KASHIF; in the same sector, we have the [JABAL](#) AL-TAYR.

In the oasis of Dakhlah, a single site bears the name of Dayr (Dayr al-Hajar), but this is in reality a temple of the Ptolemaic period. A village perpetuates by its name (al-Qalamun) the existence of a marsh planted with reeds and perhaps the presence of Christian hermits, for these made great use of them (*kalamon* in Greek).

In the oasis of al-Farafrah, in the latitude of Asyut, traces remain of occupation by one or more Christian hermits at the place called ‘AYN JILLAW.

Still farther to the north, in the oasis of al-Bahariyyah (that of the north), are the ruins of a church called al-Dayr, which may [preserve](#) the memory of a monastery or a hermit center. Besides, nearby some ruins are said to be those of the monastery of al-Ris.

Farther north, in the middle of the present desert road from Cairo to Alexandria is the famous Wadi al-Natrun with its four still active monasteries. To the west is the Khashm al-Qu‘ud, excavated in 1932 by

Omar Toussoun; he identified the site, however, as being the KELLIA.

Finally, not far from the oasis of Siwa, al-'Araj perhaps preserves traces of occupation by Christian hermits, while a traveler at the beginning of the twentieth century notes vestiges of a monastery in the oasis of Siwa itself.

It is appropriate to mention, following the *History of the Patriarchs*, a "mountain called [Jabal](#) Jarad, which was perhaps near the Wadi al-Natrun; we must point out, although no trace of it remains, the monastery that was near the milestone marking the twentieth mile from Alexandria" (the *Eikoston*).

As can be seen, the traces of monasticism in the western desert are numerous. We must also mention, although the exact site is not known, a monastery of the [inhabitants](#) of the oasis, probably Kharjah, attested by papyri and then dependent on the province of Aphrodito (today the town of Kom Ishqaw).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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