MONASTERY OF ST. MACARIUS

It is the southernmost monastery in Wadi al-Natrun. The monastery bears the name of its patron St. Macarius, who died in about 390. This monastery became an official occasional residence for the Coptic patriarchs toward the middle of the sixth century when the Byzantine authorities did not allow them to reside in Alexandria. Thirty patriarchs were chosen from among the monks of the Monastery of St. Macarius, and many patriarchs consecrated the chrism there. Epiphanius of Jerusalem (ca. 800) speaks of “a thousand cells” dominated by a fortress at the site of the monastery.

The old church of St. Macarius was dedicated in later times to St. John the Baptist and Patriarch Benjamin I (626-665). Its 12th-century paintings feature interesting scenes from the Old and New Testaments: Moses and Aaron, the sacrifice of Abraham, the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek, the purification of Isaiah, Jacob’s dream, Job, the three Hebrews, John the Baptist holding a medallion containing “the lamb,” the Annunciation to Zachariah, the Annunciation, the Nativity, Christ and Nathanael, Christ flanked by the Apostles and evangelists, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse, and many saints as well.

The monastery’s keep or tower is one of the best preserved of its kind in Egypt. It dates from the 13th century and contains a number of chapels and a church. Some of the chapels are decorated with the figures of famous Coptic saints such as Sts. Antony, Paul of Thebes, and Pachomius. By the middle of the 14th century, the monastery began to decline because of the Black Death, the Mamluk persecution, and the
impoverishment of the Coptic Church.

The monastery’s library possessed valuable manuscripts for the Coptic literature and liturgy, of which the vast majority were removed to Europe. Beginning in 1969 the monastery witnessed a “renaissance” when Father Matta al-Miskin and his disciples started to revive monastic life there. See also MONASTICISM, EGYPTIAN.
The southwestern corner: St. John the Baptist and one of the Twenty-Four Priests.
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The Church of St. Macarius, haykal of Benjamin. Paintings on the west wall: Christ enthroned accompanied by the archangels Michael and Gabriel and the apostles.

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The Church of St. Macarius, *haykal* of St. Mark! St. John the Baptist: the dome (rebuilt at the beginning of the twentieth century) with twelfth-century paintings in the octagon.

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Seraph on the pendentive of the dome of the central haykal, dedicated to St. Macarius/ Patriarch Benjamin.
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The Church of the Forty-Nine Martyrs, rebuilt by Mu'allim Ibrahim al-Guhari (eighteenth century), with the keep in the background. Ibrahim al-Guhari (d. 1795) was one of the Guhari brothers buried in Old Cairo (see pages 106-107).
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The high priest Aaron (right) and his brother Moses, receiving the Tablets of the Law (east part of octagon). A deesis (Christ accompanied by his mother Mary and St. John the Baptist, both interceding for mankind) is painted below.

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The tomb of the Forty-Nine Martyrs, monks slain in the third Berber raid on the monasteries of Wadi al-Natrun in 444.

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The Church of St. Macarius, haykal of Benjamin. Paintings on the west wall: Christ enthroned accompanied by the archangels Michael and Gabriel and the apostles.
The northern part of the west wall: apostles and (at the far right) St. Stephen. Two equestrian saints, St. Claudius and St. Menas, are depicted below.
St. Onophrius, St. John, and St. Samuel in the Chapel of the Hermits, one of the chapels in the keep. In the early sixteenth century, the Ethiopian monk Takla decorated the keep chapels.