

## **NITRIA**

It is one of the earliest monastic habitations in Egypt. The site is called by Greek and Latin writers Nitria or the mountain of Nitria. It has been confused with **Kellia** and **Scetis** and was correctly identified by Hugh G. Evelyn White as Gabal al-Barnoug, where the present village of al-Barnoug stands at the edge of the Libyan Desert, about 15 kilometers south of [Damanhur](#) in the western part of the Delta. Close to al-Barnoug there are natron lakes from which natron was extracted.

About 325-330, St. **Amoun** founded a colony of hermits there. One of his famous disciples, who lived with him in Nitria, is **Pambo**. Nitria prospered quickly and the number of the monks became very large so that St. Amoun and St. **Antony** established Kellia to provide more solitude for the monks. Around 386 St. **Jerome** reported 5,000 monks in Nitria; though the number may be exaggerated, it shows that it was an enormous colony of monks. [Palladius](#), who lived for one year in Nitria, wrote the most detailed description of that monastic site at the end of the fourth century. He reported a church, a hostelry, shops, and seven bakeries.

The monks lived independently in their cells during the weekdays and assembled to celebrate the weekly mass. Apparently, the number of the monks in Nitria decreased quickly and it was abandoned, probably before the end of the seventh century. When in 645 or 646, **Patriarch** Benjamin went from **Alexandria** to [Wadi al-Natrun](#), he proceeded directly to Kellia without stopping at Nitria, implying that it was no longer an important monastic habitation. Unlike Kellia and Scetis, little remains at Nitria today.

**GAWDAT GABRA**

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