Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon)

Aswan, Egypt 2011
Acknowledgements

The St. Mark Foundation
Dr. Fawzy Estafanous
Mrs. Youssria Sawris
Laura Watson
Joseph Foss

Consultant/Photography:
Gawdat Gabra
Sami Shaker
Father Maximus El Muharraq

Dedication:
This book is dedicated to His Eminence Metropolitan Hedra
Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon)
Aswan, Egypt

The Monastery of Anba Hatre is located south of the island of Elephantine near the west bank of the Nile. Churches were found in this area of Aswan as early as the third century. Only the ruins of some ancient churches are there now, along with two monasteries, the Monastery of Anba Hatre and the Monastery at Qubbat al-Hawa.

Anba Hatre was named for an anchorite who was consecrated a bishop by Patriarch Theophilus; he died in the time of Emperor Theodosius I (379-395). By the sixth century there was a monastic settlement in the region of Anba Hatre’s hermitage. It was extensively rebuilt in the eleventh century and by the end of the thirteenth century had been abandoned. Over time it came to be referred to as the Monastery of St. Simeon.

The monastery is divided into a lower and upper terrace by a cliff. The terraces are enclosed by a wall with a parapet and have their own gates. The lower terrace holds the original rock caves of the saints, the church, the baptistery and rooms for pilgrims. The church is the most important example of a domed oblong church in Egypt. The upper terrace is a large keep with living quarters for the community. A permanent housing complex, the keep is the most developed of its kind. It holds cells for the monks, a refectory, a kitchen and workshops. The monastery also holds tombstones of great import, and pottery kilns, significant for research on Aswan pottery.
Explanation of Figures And Photo Orientation.

The book has been structured to provide the reader with the opportunity to experience the monastery as if one were walking through it. Consequently, the maps in the book should be used to provide an understanding of where the photos in this book were taken in relation to the monastery as a whole. Page three, the Map of the Grounds, provides an aerial view of the overall monastery complex, showing the area within its walls as well as the area surrounding the walls. This view, with the exception of the area outside of the monastery walls, corresponds with page four, which is a Map of the Monastery, with the upper and lower terraces, the church, and the keep, labelled.

Page fifteen is a floor plan of the lower terrace of the monastery. Page twenty-five is a floor plan of the Church of Anba Hatre, with features labelled. Page fifty-nine is a floor plan of the upper terrace of the monastery and is a floor plan of the keep. The majority of the photos in this book are provided with a key in the form of a letter, for example (A), to show the reader where the image is in relationship to the monastery as a whole. These letters correspond to the keys on the maps on pages fifteen, twenty-five, fifty-nine and sixty.

The illustrations used in this book were primarily found in the publication Description Générale du Monastère de Saint Siméon A’ Aswan, by Hugo Monneret de Villard, Milan 1927.
Aerial map of the grounds of the Monastery of Anba Hatre and its immediate surroundings.
Map of the grounds of the monastery, which corresponds with the aerial map on page 3. The lower terrace contains the church. The upper terrace was designed to serve as a keep and is approached by a stairway along the north wall of the church.
View from the south of the southern wall of the monastery. Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon).
Above: Detail of eastern wall of monastery. Section of keep. View looking east.
Page Following: Northern fence of monastery on lower level. Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon).
Preceding Page: Northern wall of keep, upper level.
Above: View from the west of the western wall. Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon).
The monastery is separated by an upper and lower terrace, as in the above illustration. Large edifice in center is keep. Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon).
Map of the lower terrace. The projection on the eastern wall is the entrance gateway. Please use this for identification of photos on the following pages.
Previous Page: Lower level of monastery, facing northeast. Area is to the north of the church. (Areas A and B).
Above Left: View from main entrance to monastery, facing north. Lower level along northeast wall.
Above Right: Northeast wall looking east. (Area A).
Left: View facing north of lower terrace of monastery.
Right: View from the lower terrace looking west from the northeast wall of the monastery.
Above Left: Anteroom to church, looking north at ruins to the north of the church on lower level.
Above Right: Ruins to the north of the church on the lower level facing west. (Area B).
Ruins to the north of the church on the lower level facing east with detail of murals. (Area B).
Above Left: Ruins to the north of the church on the lower level facing north.
Above Right: Ruins to the north of the church on the lower level facing southwest. (Area B).
Ruins to the north of the church on the lower level facing south. View is through the door of a room on the inner courtyard. (Area B).
View to the east from upper terrace of southeastern edge of church with main entrance visible behind vaulted arch in background. (Areas A and B).
Church of the Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon)

The church was built in the first half of the eleventh century. Although only the lower part remains, it is one of the oldest and most significant of its kind. It is the best example of a domed oblong church in existence in Egypt. It is an octagon-domed structure, with two domed bays providing for the nave.

The sanctuary, which is rectangular, was connected with the khurus so that they formed a large single trefoil with three rectangular compartments. The baptistery was found at the east end of the south aisle. The church had many wall paintings that were still visible in the late 1800s but are now either badly damaged or destroyed. It was initially believed that all the paintings dated to the eleventh or twelfth centuries. However, it has been determined that there is more than one layer of paintings in the apse of the church.

The eastern semidome of the sanctuary is painted with a scene of Christ enthroned within the mandorla with flames licking at its base. On the north wall of the sanctuary there are sections of a painting of haloed figures representing the twenty-four priests. On the west side of the church in a niche is a painting of the Virgin Mary standing between two angels.

There is a grotto at the west end of the north aisle that is an ancient rock tomb used by the monks as a habitation. Its three walls were decorated with various figures.
Inset from map of the lower terrace (page 15). Floor plan of the Church of Anba Hatre. Please use this for identification of photos on the following pages.
Church and southeast parapet with view to surrounding area as seen from upper terrace. The perspective is facing southeast from the area above the northern wall of the church. (Area C).
Projected elevation of the Church of the Monastery of Anba Hatre.
Left: Lower terrace of monastery. Entrance to the church through the northern wall in the northwestern area of the church. View is from inside the church and is facing north.

Right: Identical area of the church, but facing northeast. (Area C-1). The Church of Anba Hatre.
The Church of Anba Hatre. The east wall of the church faces visitors as they enter the monastery. Note that the eastern zone of the church is enlarged by the addition of two rectangular rooms, covered with half domes, that flank the sanctuary. (Area C-3).
Left: Rectangular room covered with half dome that flanks the sanctuary. The room is to the north of the sanctuary. The view is looking east. Upper Right: Detail of arched room. Lower Right: Vaulted arch. The Church of Anba Hatre. (Area C-2).
View looking from inside the rectangular room on north side of the sanctuary, across the sanctuary to the room flanking the sanctuary on the south (Area C).
Previous Page: The Church of Anba Hatre with eastern semidome of the sanctuary visible on the eastern wall. (Area C-3).
This Page: Detail of the semidome. (Area C-3). Church of Anba Hatre.
Detail of the semidome. Remains of a painting of haloed figures seated, representing the twenty-four elders. (Area C-3). Church of Anba Hatre.
Christ enthroned within the mandorla held by two angels with flames licking its base. On the right is a person with a square nimbus. Christ has a book on one knee held with his left hand. His right hand is raised in blessing. Eastern semidome of the sanctuary. (Area C-3).
Eastern semidome of the sanctuary with corresponding south wall. Remains of a painting of haloed figures seated, representing the twenty-four elders. The decorations below the painting of Christ feature arcades and pendentives. (Area C-3). Church of Anba Hatre.
Left: Detail of the semidome. (Area C-3).
Right: Rectangular room covered with half dome that flanks the sanctuary. The room is to the south of the sanctuary. View is looking east. (Area C-4). Church of Anba Hatre.
Left: baptismal font in baptistery located behind the southernmost rectangular room with half dome. (Area C-4). Right: View looking west out of the rectangular room covered with half dome that flanks the sanctuary. The room is to the south of the sanctuary. (Area C-4).
View of the southern wall of the church, facing southeast back towards the sanctuary. (Areas C-4 and C-5). Church of Anba Hatre.
Above: Southern wall of the nave. (Area C-5).
Below Left: Detail. Below Right: Detail of church flooring. (Area C-5).
Central nave with keep in background, facing southwest. (Areas C-5 and C-6). Church of Anba Hatre.
Above: View of western semidome from sanctuary. (Area C-6). Page Following: Niche on west side of the church with painting showing the Virgin Mary standing between two bowing angels. Detail. (Area C-6). Church of Anba Hatre.
Left: Niche on west side of the church with painting showing the Virgin Mary standing between two bowing angels. (Area C-6).
Above Right: Detail. (Area C-6). Church of Anba Hatre.
Above Left: Western wall of church with niche. (Area C-6). Above Right: Northwestern area of church. Opening in wall leads to grotto at the west end of the north aisle of the church. (Areas C-6 and C-7). Church of Anba Hatre.
Preceding Page: Entrance to grotto. (Area C-7). Above: Ceiling of grotto at the west end of the north aisle of the church. It served as an ancient Egyptian rock tomb that was used by monks as a habitation. Detail. Paintings are dated to 600 or 700 AD. (Area C-7).
Representation of the ceiling of the grotto at the west end of the north aisle of the church. Busts are featured within large squares and small octagons, set against the geometrical design of a fretwork pattern. Paintings are dated to 600 or 700 AD. (Area C-7).
Ceiling of the grotto at the west end of the north aisle of the church. Detail. Paintings are dated to 600 or 700 AD. (Area C-7).
Ceiling of the grotto at the west end of the north aisle of the church. Detail. (Area C-7). Church of Anba Hatre.
Left: Wall of the grotto at the west end of the north aisle of the church. (Area C-7).
Right: Wall of the grotto. Detail. (Area C-7). Church of Anba Hatre.
Preceding Page and Above: Wall of the grotto at the west end of the north aisle of the church. Detail. (Area C-7). Church of Anba Hatre.
Wall of the grotto at the west end of the north aisle of the church. Detail. (Area C-7). Church of Anba Hatre.
This Page: Lower level of monastery near the southwestern corner of the church. (Area D).

Page Following: View facing south from the upper level of the lower terrace south of the church. (Areas C, D, E, and H).
Preceding Page and Above with Detail: View from upper level of the area south of the church, looking northwest. (Area D).
Map of the upper terrace.
Please use this map for identification of the photos on the following pages.
Inset from map of upper terrace, showing the keep and its kitchen, refectory, corridor and cells. Use this as a guide to the photos on the following pages.
The keep. This three-story building represents the climax of the keep-like lodging complex. Its massive size is unusual. It composes the upper terrace and has cells, a refectory, a kitchen and other facilities. It is approached by a stairway along the north wall of the church.
Left and Above Right: The keep is accessed from the lower terrace through a stairway along the northeast area of the church. The view is looking west at the eastern wall of the keep. (Areas B and E). Right: Detail of the eastern wall of the keep. (Area E).
Left: View of southeastern corner of small structure on the eastern side of the keep. (Area E-1).
Right: Small structure from its northern entryway. (Area E-1). Page Following: Interior of small structure with mural details (Area E-1) and with view looking out of structure to the north at the upper terrace. (Areas D and H).
Left: Southern wall of keep on upper terrace. Right: Western wall of keep on upper terrace. (Area E).
Page Following: Northern wall of keep with semidome entryway. (Area E).
Ruins to the north of the church overlooking the sanctuary on the upper level of the keep. (Area E).
Murals in arched rooms along the northeastern corner of the keep. (Area E-2).
Above Left: Cell. Above Right: Vaulted corridor. The corridor runs north-south and contains the monk cells. The wall at its northern end is the northern enclosure wall of the monastery. The refectory is on its northwest side. (Area E-3).
Murals from southern area of the keep, looking west. (Area E-4).
Room in the keep along the southwestern wall of the keep, facing south, with detail. (Area E-5).
Room in the keep along the southwestern wall of the keep, facing north, with detail. (Area E-5).
Refectory. Upper terrace, facing south. Rectangular room in the keep, divided by a row of four columns. The floor was paved with baked bricks. (Area E-6).
Left: Refectory facing northwest. Right: The floor has seven mud brick rings that indicate the location of seats used by monks when they took their common meals. The monks sat in groups, arranged in a circle, and not at long tables. (Area E-6).
Detail from the kitchen in the keep. (Area E-7).
Left: Kitchen, facing south. (Area E-7).
Right: Detail from kitchen in keep. (Area E-7).
Left: North wall of keep with semi-domes in foreground, upper level, looking southwest from the north wall of the monastery. (Area E).
Right and Page Following: Semi-dome on north wall of keep looking north with second semidome. (Area E-2).
Left and Above Right: Vaulted structures found in the Monastery of Anba Hatre. (Area E-3).
Below Right: Illustration of construction of domed structures found in the Monastery of Anba Hatre.
Illustration of arch design and construction from the Monastery of Anba Hatre. Note similar design on the arch below from the Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon).
Left: Ruins in the keep, looking southwest. (Area F).
Right: Northwestern corner of monastery on upper level facing north. (Area F).
Left: Upper terrace, looking southeast at the western wall of the keep from the northwestern corner of the monastery. (Area F).
Right: Northwestern corner of the monastery facing north. (Area F).
This Page: Ruins along western fence on upper terrace with detail. (Area F).
Page Following: Upper terrace facing west. Area is viewed from the keep. (Area G).
Left: Artifacts from chamber where ovens were located, upper level, facing northwest. (Area G).
Right: Artifact from chamber where salt extraction took place, upper level, facing east. (Area G).
Above and Below Right: Area where oil pressing took place, upper level facing north and west, respectively. (Area G). Below Left: Oil press detail. (Area G).
Left and Right: Ruins from upper terrace in the southwestern area of the monastery, facing south. (Area G). Page Following: Ruins on the upper level in the western area of the monastery, facing northwest. (Areas G and H).
Left and Above Right: Section of western wall on upper level. (Area G).

Below Right: Southwestern corner of monastery on upper level along the southern wall facing west. (Area H).
Left: Upper level from keep, facing south. (Area H).
Right: Arched ruins along southern wall of upper terrace in the southwestern corner. View is facing south. (Area H).
Ruins. Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon).
Ruins. Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon).
Left and Above Right: Illustration of the process of creating the domed ceilings at the Monastery of Anba Hatre.
Lower Right: Domed ceiling. Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon).
Above and Below Left: Illustrations of the construction of the tombs found in the Monastery of Anba Hatre. Below Right: Tombs. Upper terrace.
This Page: View of upper and lower terraces from the southeastern corner of the keep, looking southeast. (Areas H and D).

Page Following: View of the lower terrace from the southeastern corner of the keep, looking northeast. (Areas D, C and B).
New construction to the south of the monastery buildings. This photo was taken during the construction of the new cathedral. The cathedral has now been completed. Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon).
Additional Sources

Monastery of Anba Hatre (St. Simeon)

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