



Khirbet Anab al-Kabir



By Awni Mohammad Shawamra

Khirbet Anab al-Kabir is located 5 kilometers southwest of Al-Dahariyeh at an elevation of 586 meters above sea level. The northern part of the site is presently occupied by the village Anab al-Kabir. According to popular narration, the name Anab is derived from the Arabic word for grapes, as the area was famed for its vine cultivation, and grape presses are abundant. Its residents are descendants of the inhabitants of Al-Dahariyeh area and of Arab al-Ramadin (the Bedouins of the Ramadin). They work in agriculture and raise poultry and livestock, including birds, goats, sheep, and more. Anab al-Kabir is characterized by its moderate climate, purity of air, and the beauty of the environment and flowers, especially in spring. Its residents

General view of Khirbet Anab al-Kabir. Photo by Awni Shawamra.



Khirbet Anab al-Kabir church. Photo by Awni Shawamra.

are distinguished by their generosity and hospitality. Some residents of the village of Anab al-Kabir still live in ancient caves with their livestock because this lifestyle is compatible with the climate and the fluctuations of weather throughout the year, moving between rural and nomadic ways of life.

In 1863, the French explorer and amateur archaeologist Victor Guérin described the place as Anab al-Kabir (the great) with caves, cisterns, winepresses, and the ruins of a church. By November 1874, the Palestine Exploration Fund's *Survey of Western Palestine* noted that Anab included extensive ruins on a flat ridge where caves, rock-cut cisterns, winepresses, heaps of stones – most of them carved – and fallen pillars were found. There are ruins of a church that seems to predate the Crusader era, the remains and dimensions of which were described and a top plan was done. In 1890, William M.F. Petrie visited the site. He describes the mosque, provides a floor plan, reports on a lintel with crosses found over its northern door, and further states that there are remains of a church on a hilltop east of the mosque, of which he gives a plan and measurements.

An inscription in the church reads: Under the most saintly and most blessed [Anastasius?] the bishop, and the most God-loving [E]lias [and Serg] ius? the chorepiscopi and Oule[fos and] Anianos priests, the (halls) here were paved with mosaics.



Anab church is Byzantine in style, located approximately 300 meters east of Khirbet Anab al-Kabir. It was erected on bedrock in an open area away from the dwellings and served as the religious center for the residents of Anab and the farms and monasteries in the vicinity. The basilica spread over an area of 38 by 20 meters and included an atrium, a narthex, a praying hall, an external apse, two small pastophoria to the

side of the chancel, and a north wing. The church floor was paved with colorful mosaics that feature beautiful geometric and decorative forms, floral motifs, and birds, as well as Greek and Syriac inscriptions that include the mention of some names.

According to Eusebius (*Εὐσέβιος*, fourth century), the name Anab is cited as a village in the territory of Beit Gubrin (*Ἐλευθερόπολις*, Eleutheropolis).

The complex of the church seems to have been destroyed in the earthquake of 749. Also, the figurative depictions in the mosaics, including birds and animals, were mutilated by iconoclasts, but the floors were immediately repaired, indicating that Christian occupation continued after this event. Phase IV, the church of Anab al-Kabir was used for habitation during the Mamluk period (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries).



Mosaics at Khirbet Anab al-Kabir. Photo by Awni Shawamra.

Archaeologists distinguished four construction phases, as follows: Phase I, the basilica and the narthex were constructed and paved under Justinian during the sixth century; Phase II, an atrium and north wing were added in the late sixth century, with the mosaic inscriptions in the nave, narthex, and atrium mentioning mosaic artists, clergy, and two bishops associated with laying down the mosaics; Phase III, there was iconoclastic defacement of the mosaic floors, and some additions were made in the atrium during the Umayyad period (eighth century).

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