

NAQLUN 1993

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The 1993 season of excavations and conservation work at Ne-kloni monastery lasted from October 8 until November 7, 1993¹ and covered the following sites: Kom D, the northern part of the monastic complex² and the interior of the church of Archangel Gabriel (continuation of the work on wall paintings).³

¹ The mission included: Włodzimierz Godlewski, director of the mission, Mr. Tomasz Górecki, archaeologist; Mr. Jarosław Dobrowolski and Mrs. Agnieszka Dobrowolska, architects; Mrs. Ewa Parandowska and Mrs. Katarzyna Młodziejewicz-Rachuta, conservators and Ms Magdalena Żurek, student of archaeology.

The Egyptian side was represented by Mr. Issam Abdel-rahman, Inspector of the Islamic and Coptic Section of the EAO in Fayum, and four other members of the section. The mission is grateful to the staff of EAO offices in Cairo and in Fayum for the support and cooperation it received throughout the season. We are also grateful to the monks from Deir el-Malak monastery for their never wavering hospitality.

² For results of earlier work at the site see: W. Godlewski, Deir el-Naqlun, 1992, *PAM IV*, 1992 (1993), pp. 45-48; T. Górecki, Deir el-Naqlun 1992: the pottery, *PAM IV*, 1992 (1993), pp. 61-64; W. Godlewski, Naqlun 1988-92, Proceedings of the 6th International Congress of Coptic Studies in Washington, Washington 1993 (in press).

³ The conservation work in the church has been carried out since 1991 by Mrs. Ewa Parandowska, conservator from the National Museum in Warsaw.

KOM D

The 1993 season saw a continuation of the excavations in buildings I.DB and II.DB, two parallel monastic structures which were undoubtedly contemporary and built according to a coherent project of the monastery's development. The two buildings were separated by a court 2.50 m wide and presumably communicated on the level of the first or perhaps even second floor. Their function, however, differed.

I.DB is a large building, measuring 6.50 by 7 m, presumably without entrance on the ground floor. Although its northern part still remains to be excavated, it would appear from the preserved ruins and the lack of inner divisions that the entrance must have been situated higher than the preserved level of the structure. The building was erected directly on bedrock and no evidence of any earlier use was discovered in this area. The outer foundations were of finely dressed limestone blocks and baked brick. Mud brick was used inside as well as for the upper parts of the walls. The interior had no divisions and was an almost homogeneous brick structure, filled only in the central part with gravel and debris. On this level the structure could hardly have been anything but a monolithic platform of sorts, supporting the idea that the building had been defensive in nature: a high tower where monks could retreat in times of danger. A wooden drawbridge presumably connected the tower with the building II.DB on the south, as in a number of other medieval monastic complexes in Egypt.⁴

⁴ C.C. Walters, *Monastic Archaeology in Egypt*, Warminster 1974, pp. 86-99.

The tower was initially a freestanding structure and the II.DB building, which developed to the east and north, respected this. At some point, an unidentified structure was added to the facade of the western wall of the tower; whatever its function, it was by no means intended for habitation.

II.DB is a rectangular mud-brick structure measuring 7 by 12 m, and was possibly even larger (room D.22 to the west is not fully excavated). It has a history of alterations. Originally, there was an entrance from the east and the plan consisted of a number of rooms located on either side of the central corridor. The building was undoubtedly storeyed, to judge by an inside staircase (D.20) presumably facilitating communication with the nearby tower. Rooms on both floors were plastered and decorated with paintings (fragments of upper floor murals were discovered in the debris filling spaces on the ground floor). It is difficult to determine what purpose particular units served. Two rooms on the west (D.19 and D.22) communicated initially with each other under a double arcade; both had a stone floor, additionally covered with waterproof and finely polished mortar. The presence of such a floor is justified, at least in part, by a small basin which appears to be of quite unique form. It recalls an armchair with a rather shallow central pool and small depressions joined by a channel in the floor in front of it. The purpose and operation of the basin remains unclear. It could have had some relation with medical operations, e.g. steam baths carried out in the monastery.⁵

⁵ The existence of a "hospital" at Naqlun seems to be further evidenced by a document discovered in the so-called rubbish dump, in which a hospital *oikonomos* is mentioned.

The function of the neighboring room D.22 is equally unclear, but here it must be remembered that a part of the room still remains to be uncovered. In the northeastern corner there is a large container decorated with a cross in relief on its southern wall.

Debris and pieces of the ruined ceiling filled the rooms in structure II.DB. Mixed into this debris were numerous examples of pottery: vessels, oil lamps, but also objects of wood, glass, ropes and braiding. There is little doubt that this is what remains of the rooms' equipment and of the structural elements, particularly doors and window openings.

Several dozens of parchment cards written in Coptic, fully or partly preserved, were discovered in rooms D.19 and D.22. A number of documents on paper are in Coptic and Arabic. Significantly, not one Greek text was noted. A considerable part of the texts is undoubtedly of literary character; they come presumably from six or seven codices, all of them written in a sure hand, possibly even from the same scriptorium. At least two codices had full-page illustrations in the form of large decorative crosses. The codex was bound in leather and the covers were additionally reinforced with paper or rather papyrus waste. One such cover was discovered with a thick wad of pressed papyri cards to stiffen it.

The illustrations as well as the writing of the texts resemble quite closely the codices from the library collection of the Hamouli monastery in the Fayum, discovered by some fellahin around 1910 in the ruins of the monastery and currently located in

the collections of the Pierpoint Morgan Library in New York⁶ and the Coptic Museum in Cairo. The Hamouli texts are dated by colophons to the 9th-10th centuries, providing a specific time horizon for part of the texts from the II.DB building.

Among the non-literary texts: letters and documents, there is one which is particularly noteworthy. It is a letter written on a scrap of parchment card, from the monastery clerks **κληρικός
μ ταου νεκλονι** to Apa Khael, dated to the 16th of the month Paone in 992. Rolled up, the letter was wrapped in a rag and tied with string. It will remain a mystery whether it had actually reached its addressee.

CHURCH OF THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

Conservation and documentation work was conducted inside the church on the western wall of the present narthex and on the southern wall of the hurus of the altered church. This choice was dictated by intensive renovation being carried out by the monks inside the building as well as in adjacent structures. The work which has already been carried out has altered significantly the conditions in which the paintings are to be seen and has broadened the range of possible conservation work. The old ceiling beams have been removed and the paintings have been fully protected from humidity in the winter season. Egyptian conservators proceeded with preservation procedures immediately after the discovery of the murals in the narthex; however, since

⁶ H. Hyvernat, *A Check List of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, New York 1919. For full page illustrations with representations of the cross, see J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits copies et coptes-arabes illustrés*, Paris 1974, pp. 57-61, Pl. 3.2; M. Cramer, *Koptische Buchmalerei*, Recklinghausen 1964, pp. 40-51, Figs 32, 50-51.

the paintings had not been sufficiently cleaned at the start, it caused considerable difficulties and extended the time necessary for proper preservation to be carried out.

On the west wall of the church naos, which is presently the west wall of the narthex, two new compositions were revealed: *Maiestas Domini* in the central part of the cosmic cross supported by two angels, and an unknown, mounted warrior saint with a youthful face. The two paintings belong undoubtedly to the original decoration of the church interior and can be dated to the second half of the 12th century or the early 13th at the latest.

On the south wall of the church *hurus* three fragmentarily preserved compositions were revealed. The relatively most complete picture is that of three standing anachoretai facing forward; a legend identifies one of them as Simeon. To the left of this composition there is a fragmentary representation of a warrior saint on horseback. Below these two paintings there is a fragment of a larger composition depicting a standing Christ assisted by an apostle(?) on his right. In terms of style, this composition differs from the rest of the paintings inside the church.

It is now safe to say that the inside of the church of Archangel Gabriel, the naos as well as the *hurus*, was decorated with a single register of painted compositions placed about 2 m above the church floor. The church was painted after a renovation and rebuilding which resulted in the blocking of most of the windows and the separation of the *hurus* from the naos. It is as yet impossible to document all the stages of the renovation process and to put a specific date on it. All we can be certain of is that the rebuilding must have preceded the painting of the murals.

CONSERVATION OF WALL PAINTINGS

The conservation programme included structural reinforcement, replacement of putties and surface cleaning of the paintings in the narthex, on the northern end of the western wall. The superimposed layers of secondary plastering were removed by Egyptian conservators who used Paraloid to protect the surface of the painted layer. Cracks and fissures were filled with gypsum. In selected parts of the paintings a thin layer of secondary plaster was left. In several places it was necessary to reattach peeling fragments of plaster and to reinforce the bonds between the original painted layer and the ground underneath; injections of Primal AC 33 were used for this purpose. Upon removing the secondary layers of plastering from around the wall paintings, a lime mortar band was applied to reinforce the edges. The same mortar was used to fill in the cracks and losses upon removing the gypsum which had been used for temporary protection. The secondary plastering and whitewashing were removed from the surface of the paintings mechanically. Chemical means were employed to clean large surfaces, especially the extremely dirty and sooty lower parts of the compositions; Paraloid which had been used at first was removed with compresses of ethyl alcohol and acetone as well as mechanically. The work still has to be completed in the future.

Investigations of the southern wall of the church revealed some small fragments of paintings in the central part of the wall and three better preserved compositions in its eastern end, inside the *hurus*. Proceeding with a layer-by-layer examination, it was found that the original painted layer is very weakly attached to the wall of mud bricks set in a mud mortar and that the secondary plaster layers are hard and closely adhering to the

painted surface. It was also found that the painted layer weakly adhered to the ground, especially in parts done in green. Injections of Primal AC 33 and Movilith DC 50 were used to attach the original mortar to the wall, before the removing of the superimposed layers of plaster started. A special apparatus was employed to exert pressure on the peeling blisters after the injections had been made. In places where large fragments had started to peel, the blisters were filled with a mortar of hydrated lime and sifted and washed sand with addition of Vinavil. Scalpels and chisels were employed to clean the painted surface mechanically; the final cleaning was done with the aid of glass brushes and bread rubbers. Weakened parts of the polychromy were reinforced with a 3% solution of Paraloid B 72 in ethyl alcohol. The edges of the paintings had a lime-and-sand mortar (1:4 hydrated lime and sand) band put on to reinforce them. Damages and loses of the painted surface were filled with the same mortar. The undecorated fragments of the western and northern walls were covered with new plaster.