

NAQLUN

EXCAVATIONS 1995

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The Polish Mission at Naqlun (Deir el-Malak Gubriel) conducted archaeological and conservation work from October 6 to November 14, 1995¹ in continuation of activities carried out in previous seasons inside the Church of Archangel Gabriel and on the site of Kom D in the northern part of the kom.² A new site, hermitage 44, was also explored in compliance to the earlier adopted program.

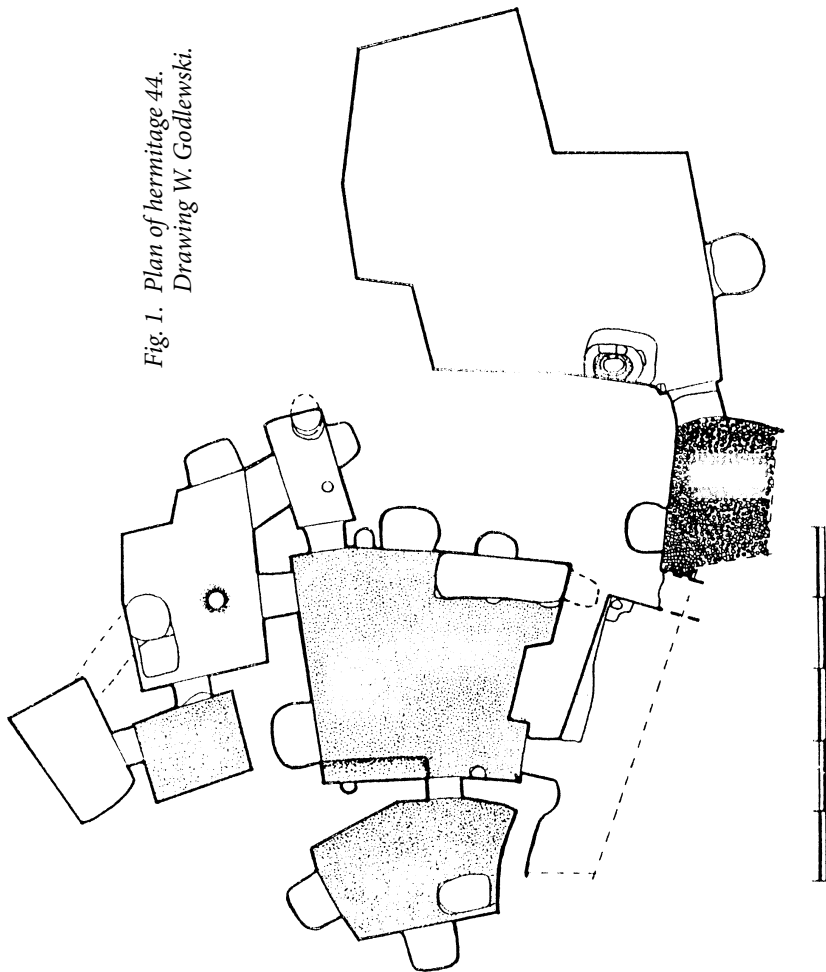
HERMITAGE 44

The complex of rock-cut hermitages at Naqlun is scattered over an extensive hilly area. The end hermitages to the north and south are 2.5 km apart. For a better understanding of hermitage occupation and chronology, new sites have been selected for exploration in different parts of the complex. Hermitage 44 is located in the northeastern end, about 1000 m from the modern monastery, in a small valley which opens toward the north, in the general direction of the site of Deir el-Banat presently explored by Egyptian colleagues. To judge by the cur-

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² W. Godlewski and E. Parandowska, Naqlun 1993, *PAM V*, 1994, pp. 55-62; T. Górecki, The pottery from Naqlun 1993, *PAM V*, 1994, pp. 63-78; E. Radziejowska-Parandowska, Coptic wall paintings in Naqlun, Egypt, *Biuletyn Informacyjny Konserwatorów Dzieł Sztuki*, English edition, vol. 4, no. 2, 1993, pp. 17-19.

*Fig. 1. Plan of hermitage 44.
Drawing W. Godlewski.*



rent understanding of Naqlun hermitage topography, hermitage 44 appears to be different from others in the complex.

Only the complex of rock-cut rooms of hermitage 44 was excavated this year, leaving the extensive courtyard practically untouched (Fig. 1). The developed complex consists of seven rooms in two groups with separate entrances leading to each one from the courtyard. Part A comprises one large unit of irregular plan and careless execution, lacking a clay floor and plaster on the walls. Inside, there was a single niche in the west wall and a finely executed storage pit by the north wall. The pit, which was cut into the rock and finely plastered inside, was presumably intended for storage of dry commodities. To judge by the finishing of the edges of the bin, it must have once been closed on the top. Unit A has all the features of a domestic area, including a set of amphorae (over 50 bases) found on the occupational level and inside the niche.

Complex B is much more elaborate and consists of one large unit (B.1) and five small ones communicating with B.1. The unit, which is characterized by fine rockcutting, is definitely the most important space inside the hermitage. The furniture includes a number of wall niches, a bench alongside the northern wall and a deep storage pit in the southwestern corner. The walls were finely plastered and whitewashed, and the floor was covered with a thick clay floor. The storage pit had a ventilation shaft opening onto the courtyard. Unit B.2 was located to the north of the main room; it is a small space, but it was also plastered and had two niches in the walls and a small storage pit. The remaining units located to the east of B.1 are all small and interconnected. Only B.5 was plastered. The other rooms all had niches, small storage pits and vessels sunk into the occupational level. The floor level of unit B.6 was lower than in neighboring rooms; it had an additional passage to B.4, cut below floor level. The units were clearly subordinated in

function to the main hall which served as an oratory and a dayroom at the same time.

The courtyard of the hermitage appears to be rather large and was presumably subdivided into smaller areas by partition walls. One such courtyard area in front of the entrance to unit A was paved with stones. In the southern end of the courtyard, on a much higher level, there was a bread oven, the first to be found in the Naqlun hermitages.

The occupation of hermitage 44 seems to have been of relatively brief duration. The complex was abandoned shortly before the roof fell in over the main unit. The excavated vessels, rare Coptic and Greek documents and coins indicate a rather early date for its foundation, presumably in the 5th century. The owner was probably a wealthy man. His tableware consisted of glass vessels and imported pottery from Cyprus and Northern Africa. Also the considerable number of brown amphorae in the domestic area of the hermitage (in the courtyard and in the storage pit of B.1) would seem to confirm the early date for the foundation. The hermitage was occupied probably by a single monk.

Hermitage 44 provides significant new information adding to the current picture of the life of the hermits at Naqlun. The hermitage follows a slightly different plan than the complexes explored hitherto. Was this dictated by its earlier foundation or by its localization and isolation, in conjunction with the nature of the underlying rock which decided about its relatively brief occupation? Presumably, these factors all played a role, but more will be known once the remaining part of the complex is explored. At present, suffice it to say that hermitage 44 belongs to the most interesting complexes uncovered so far at Naqlun.

KOM – SITE D

This year the exploration of site D was limited to the northern part of the I Building D (I.BD) and the western section of the developed II Building D (II.DB); architectural stratigraphy studies were continued in II.DB. During the excavation of rooms D.22 and D.24, several parchment cards were uncovered; the texts were Coptic with the exception of one card in both Greek and Coptic, which was probably part of a *diaconale*. Like the cards found in 1993, these texts surely come from the destroyed monastery library. The Coptic texts can be given a general date in the 9th-10th century. The two codex covers made stiff with a thick layer of strongly packed papyrus sheets, most probably with earlier texts, presumably also originate from this library. It proved impossible to separate the sheets under field conditions.

The pottery discovered with the texts comes from the 10th-12th century and includes tableware, amphorae and even some large, painted storage vessels.

Architectural research confirms the earlier hypothesis as to the presence of two towers: I.DB and II.DB on site D in the early stages of its occupation. The first had a monolithic structure of the lower part and was accessible on the first floor level by a drawbridge from II.DB, which had a staircase. The II.DB tower was subsequently developed to the east and west; the units spreading presumably upon two floors. The original tower was turned into a habitation complex. The defensive character of the northern tower (I.DB) was respected and it was left as a freestanding building. The complete excavation of the western part of the habitation complex is yet to be completed.

CHURCH OF THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

This season, the recording and conservation work in the church proceeded to include the eastern part of the church: the main apse and lateral sanctuaries. The presence of wall paintings under contemporary plaster was noted in all the spaces. The original vaults were partly destroyed when the domed ceiling was introduced, damaging the upper parts of the painting compositions. The paintings in the main apse of the church were preserved in relatively the best condition. All the newly uncovered wall paintings were cleaned and provisionally protected.

The original apse of the church had a large window with stucco grille located in the centre, and three niches in the bottom part, all framed by architectural decoration in the form of limestone bases and capitals; below the sills of the niches there ran a carved floral frieze. Between the niches there were painted crosses (four have been preserved fragmentarily) and above the niches a two-part apse composition which differs in a number of details from the typical Coptic painted apse compositions. Only the bottom part of Christ enthroned and the lower two apocalyptic beings around a fragment of the *mandorla* have been preserved. In the bottom section of the composition, on either side of the window, the apostles were represented, six to each side. Peter is dressed differently from the rest of the apostles and is additionally identified by an inscription referring to him as the archbishop Peter, which would suggest that he was represented here in dual role: as an apostle and as bishop of Alexandria (Peter the Martyr). In the central niche there is a representation of Mother of God and Child enthroned, in the lateral niches representations of two saints also sitting on thrones: St. Mark the Apostle in the northern one and in the southern one presumably the patriarch Athanasios, although any identification without the missing legends can be nothing but provisional. Accompanying the paintings were

two foundation texts, of which one mentions the archbishop Zacharias (1004-1032) and the other one Jacob from the *polis* of Arsinoe, presumably a founder of paintings found inside the church.

Coptic and Arabic inscriptions have been preserved on the apse walls and pilasters; two are dated to 1183 and 1033. The second inscription is particularly interesting as it commemorates the visit to Naqlun of Jacob, bishop of Aphroditopolis; it was written on a wall already covered with paintings. Thus, the mention of patriarch Zacharias in a foundation text, in conjunction with the inscription of bishop Jacob and the tenable assumption that the Naqlun church presumably could not have been renovated before the death of the Fatimid ruler al-Hakim (1022), permits the wall paintings at Naqlun to be dated with considerable precision to the years 1022-1032. This would make the Naqlun wall paintings the only relatively well dated set of paintings from 11th-century Egypt, although it is common knowledge that many Egyptian churches were either renovated or rebuilt after the death of al-Hakim.