

## POLISH EXCAVATIONS AT NAQLUN (1988-1989)

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In 1986 an archaeological mission of the Polish Center of Archaeology in Cairo carried out an introductory examination of the site, and during three successive seasons a geophysical survey in the kom area and excavations both in the closely built-up area of the monastic center and in, two rock hermitages were undertaken.<sup>1</sup>

Two further campaigns of excavations were conducted in October-November 1988 and in September and October 1989.<sup>2</sup> During these three seasons a survey of the area was in progress and general map of the site drawn. The site called today Deir el-Malak, in Coptic Neklonni, comprises an original monastery, a modern monastic complex, a laura and a cemetery.<sup>3</sup>(Fig. 1)

Ninety-one hermitages have been located on the slopes of the hill range running north-south to the east of the monastery. Among them, hermitage 25 belongs to a group of several grottoes cut into the rocky slope rising immediately to the northeast of the plateau occupied by the monastery. It is a large complex consisting of eight

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1 W. Godlewski, T. Herbich, E. Wipszycka-Bravo, Deir el-Naqlun (Neklonni), 1986-1987. First Preliminary Report, *Nubica* 1-2, 1989.

2 The mission led by Dr. W. Godlewski included: Mr. T. Derda, Mr. J. Dobrowolski, Mr. T. Górecki, Mr. P. Jeute, Mr. G. Kubaszewski, Dr. A. Łukaszewicz, Mr. T. Szmagier, Mr. S. Sadowski, Prof. E. Wipszycka-Bravo as well as students of archaeology: Ms. R. Czerkaski, Mrs. H. Kosińska-Sowa and Mr. T. Waliszewski. The EAO was represented by Mr. Hisham Hussain Mohamed Ahmed and Mr. Mohamed Ahmed Abdel Balim, inspectors from the Islamic and Coptic Section of EAO in Medinet el-Fayum.

3 J. Dobrowolski, The monastic complex of Naqlun – topography of the site, *Nubica* 3, in press; W. Godlewski, T. Derda, T. Górecki, Deir el-Naqlun (Neklonni) 1988-1989. Second Preliminary Report, *Nubica* 3, in press.

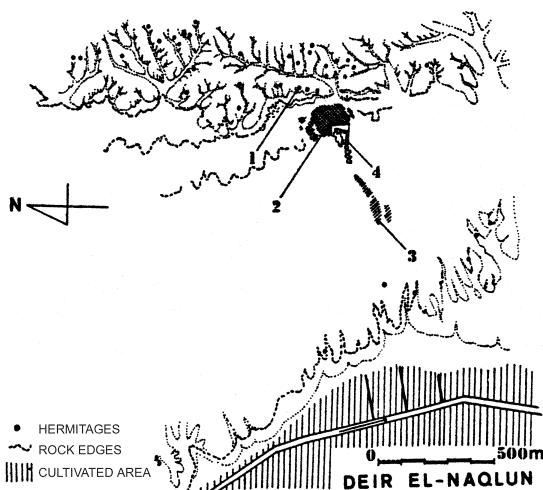


Fig. 1. *Deir el-Naqlun*. Location of the monastic complex. 1 – hermitage 25, 2 – kom, 3 cemetery, 4 – modern monastery of *Deir el-Malak Ghubrail*.

*Drawing J. Dobrowolski.*

rooms grouped in four units (A, B, C and D) located on the northeastern side of a semicircular courtyard. (Fig. 2)

Three of the units (A, B, and C) were inhabited, while unit D was a small kitchen. The great part of the hermitage was rock-cut, but some walls of A and D as well as of the courtyard were built in mud brick, blocks of stone and pottery in the mortar.

Unit A, which is the smallest, consisted of three rooms: one large and two small. Room A.2 was a typical bedroom and A.3 was simply a large niche with its parapet raised about 1 m above the floor of the room A.1. This had been modified probably to serve for sleeping as well. Room A.1 was equipped with niches and a small bench along the eastern wall. No refuse pit was noted beneath the floor. A carefully worked doorway led to it from the courtyard, at one time blocked with a mud-brick wall. This shows that unit A was the first to be isolated from the whole complex.

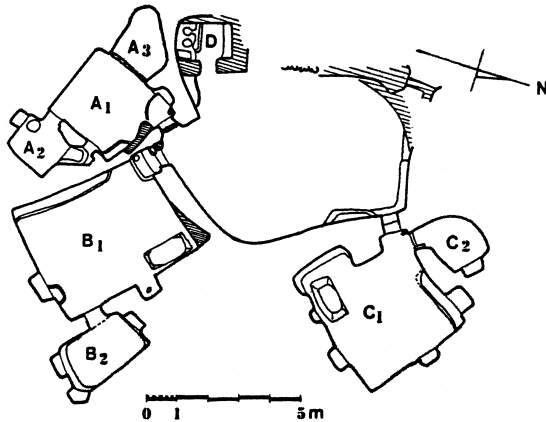


Fig. 2. Hermitage 25.

*Drawing J. Dobrowolski*

The biggest in the hermitage is unit B. It consists of a large room and a considerably smaller bedroom. The latter was cut very carefully into the rock and in its niches and on the walls traces of plaster remains. This bedroom is distinguished favorably as far as the standard is concerned from the other hermitage bedrooms in Naqlun. The large room B.1 was also rather richly equipped with two benches against the western and southern walls, numerous wall niches and a very deep pit cut into the floor in the northeastern corner of the room. The pit was filled up to the top with debris, sand and rocks and contained a large number of discarded objects, as well as documents written in Greek upon papyri. The fill is definitely homogenous and was formed during a restoration of the hermitage when the pit was covered with a thick layer of a mud floor.

Unit C consisted of two rooms as well, but was much less carefully executed than B. In room C.1 typical equipment was found

including several niches cut in the walls, a bench against the north wall and a pit in the southwestern corner. This pit was also found to be filled with homogeneous fill and partly covered with a mud floor. The fill was similar in character to the contents of the pit in B.1, but the number of recovered objects was much smaller, consisting mainly of pottery, leather products (sandals), glass and sections of rope.

The walls of room D were preserved quite low. Inside there was a small kitchen with two hearths used to prepare meals. Beneath the north wall there was a wide, comfortable bench.

As a whole, hermitage 25, quite carefully planned and executed, was intended for three persons. We may expect a master and two monks to have lived here. From its courtyard there was a spectacular view out onto the green oasis.

The dating is problematic. The archaeological material found in the two pits, in B.1 and in C.1, show that the dwelling was definitely in use in the 7th century. The second phase of the hermitage, when the complex was carefully renovated and all the pits filled, may be dated to the turn of the 7th century. With time, the rooms of unit A were excluded, probably because the ceiling had fallen in partly; only two persons seem to have inhabited the hermitage from that time. Most probably at the same time the small kitchen D was also abandoned, and Coptic documents found there permit the supposition that this may have happened in the 9th century. It would appear that in its last phase the hermitage consisted only of units B and C. Late Coptic and Arabic texts found in the fill are proof of this. The paleography of numerous texts written on paper which were uncovered in rooms A.1, B.1 and C.1 would suggest the occupation still in the 12th -13th centuries. But the fact that the texts are to be found in all the rooms, including A.1, leads us to assumption that they had been blown in here by the wind either from neighboring hermitages or from the monastery dump. The absence of glazed pottery is significant in this respect.

Excavations on the kom were carried out in two sectors: B and D, on opposite edges of the monastic complex. The whole area is covered by a dump of debris coming from the monastery. We explored a large rectangular area, measuring 16 x 3.40 m. The contents of the dumped material was removed by us in eight layers containing debris dated from the beginning of 6th century to the 9th century. Beside pottery, fragments of glass and textiles (some of them with figurative decoration), we also found 40 documents, fragmentarily preserved on papyri, written mostly in Greek. A great part of these documents are private letters from the 6th-7th centuries. One of the finds is a quire from a papyrus codex. The seven leaves of it (29 x 17.5 cm) contain several psalms in Greek. The codex can be dated to the 6th century on paleographical grounds.

Architectural remains of the monastery were found in sector D, on the northern edge of the kom. The cleared rooms D.5-8 belong to a structure added on the eastern side to the entrance of a complex of monks' cells. It was a storied building, the upper floor serving presumably as living quarters, as shown by the equipment fallen to the ground floor. These finds included limestone floor slabs, fragments of lime-mortar window grilles with glass panes and numerous fragments of wall paintings. Two separate groups of paintings were distinguished, both with figurative representations and numerous decorative friezes and frames, which could be dated to the 11th -12th centuries. In another building to the east of this, only two rooms, D.1 and D.3 were explored completely. One room was a store of amphorae set in circular depressions. A large quantity of sherds, presumably from the 11th -12th centuries, decorated mainly with comb patterns, was found there. This very interesting collection was produced partly locally and partly imported from Palestine, like the large egg-shaped amphorae.

A vast cemetery, probably the old burial ground of the monks, was also located west of the modern monastery. (Fig. 1) More than 180 tombs were identified and one was investigated. Although part

of a coffin made of palm-leaf ribs and the body had been removed, fragments of four brown amphorae together with numerous fragments of textiles belonging to the shroud and clothing of the deceased were found in the vertical shaft and burial chamber. On one of the pieces of very thin linen there was a circular woolen application representing a man in a flying chlamys, sitting on a stool with an animal at his feet. The cloth is of very fine quality, the decoration has a distinct Hellenistic air and is undoubtedly mythological. The tomb could be dated to the 6th -7th centuries AD.