

NAQLUN

EXCAVATIONS 1996

Włodzimierz Godlewski, Ewa Parandowska

The archaeological and conservation work at Naqlun in the past season continued on two sites started in earlier campaigns:¹ Hermitage 44 and the interior of the Church of the Archangel Gabriel (documentation and conservation). The season lasted from September 18 until October 30, 1996.²

HERMITAGE 44

Hermitage 44 is located in the northwestern part of the Naqlun hills, some 1200 m away from the Church of the Archangel Gabriel (Fig. 1). Last year the habitation complex was excavated and found to consist of rooms B.1-6 and a big domestic area (A) situated north of the courtyard. This season the central and southern parts of the complex were explored.

The courtyard is an extensive rectangular space, 9 x 16 m, consisting of two parts set on different levels, joined by a set of steps leading from the western part (H) to the eastern one (I); the difference in levels is about 1 m. The eastern part of the courtyard served domestic purposes: Excavations brought

¹ W. Godlewski, Naqlun. Excavations 1995, *PAM* VII, 1995, 82-88; W. Godlewski, Naqlun 1992-1996, *JCS* III, 1997 (in press); T. Derda, K. Urbaniak-Walczak, *JJP* XXVI, 1996 (in press).

² The expedition was headed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski and included: Dr. Tomasz Derda, papyrologist; Mr. Tomasz Górecki, Ms Maria Mossakowska, archaeologists; Mrs. Ewa Parandowska, Mr. Tytus Sawicki, conservators; Miss Katarzyna Fila, Mr. Cristobal Calaforra-Rzepka, conservation students; Mr. Artur Obłuski, archaeology student. The EAO was represented by Mrs. Atka Abdallah Hassanin and Mrs. Magda Abdallah Goma. On behalf of the mission I am indebted to Dr. Fahmi Abd el-Alim and Mrs. Magda el Kholy for their help and to the monks of the Naqlun monastery for their hospitality and generous assistance.

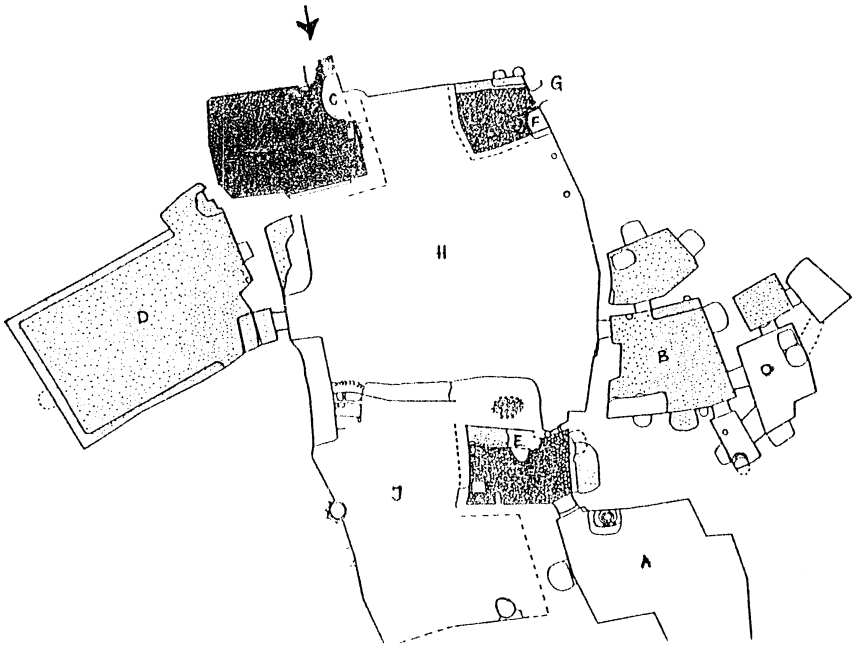


Fig. 1 Hermitage 44. Plan. Drawing W. Godlewski.

to light two bread ovens; the western end was more a passage in character, providing a means of communication between the various rooms and complexes of rooms: A, B, D and G. The courtyard surface was either bedrock or gravel. The entrance to the hermitage led from the west through a small wadi to a paved unit in the southwestern corner of the courtyard. The walls of room C were partly rock-cut and partly erected of mud brick and straw (on the side of the courtyard). The amphorae, mats and basket fragments, as well as pot stands uncovered on the pavement are indicative of the unit's domestic function, at least in the final stage. Earlier on, unit C could have been used as an entrance vestibule leading to courtyard H and unit D.

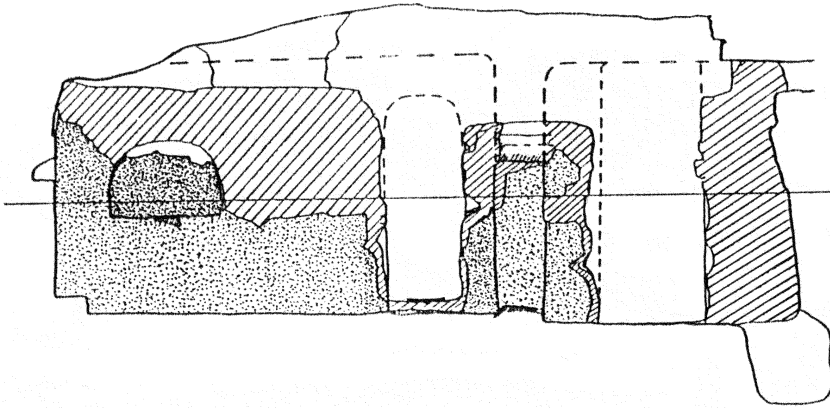


Fig. 2. Hermitage 44. Cross-section through B.1 and B.3; view looking east.
Drawing W. Godlewski.

Hence, it was similar in function to units E and F, both of which were also finely paved with stones.

Unit F was a small vestibule (2.15 x 2.40 m) leading to room G, of which only the entrance has been uncovered so far. Two small but relatively deep niches were cut into the western wall; they were set at walking level, fronted with a low parapet wall that turned into a bench further south. Small ceramic and glass vessels, pieces of wood and a *kalamos* were found inside the niches. One of the collared bowls had the name "Phibamo" engraved inside it; the name might have belonged to a resident or owner of the hermitage.³

Unit E in the northeastern corner of the courtyard was an entrance vestibule leading to domestic area A. Unit A had a bench along the northern wall and two niches cut in this wall on different levels.

Unit D (4.45 x 7.20 m), which was well-lighted through a window in the northern wall and finely plastered, remains somewhat of a mystery. It lies to the south of the courtyard and

³ The niche also contained two other vessels bearing inscriptions in black ink.

was accessible from it (Fig. 2). A bench runs along three walls. The niche in the northwestern corner might have been an entrance from the entrance vestibule (C). Judging by the rock-cut marks and the evidence provided by wall plastering, a total of three shelves could have been mounted on the western and eastern walls, about 110 cm above the benches. A small niche was also cut into the upper section of the southern wall. Unit D might have served as an assembly hall or a room for receiving guests. A more or less analogous room was discovered in Hermitage 2, although there it quite obviously served as an entrance vestibule.⁴

Explorations yielded a considerable assemblage of pottery and glass vessels, especially in unit D. Imports from North Africa and Cyprus are accompanied by a number of early Egyptian imitations. Among glass pieces, conical lamp fragments are of special interest. Both groups of objects give a provisional dating of the complex in the second half of the 5th century, making it the oldest hermitage at Naqlun. The relative homogeneity of the archaeological material would indicate that the hermitage was used for no longer than 30 to 60 years. The evidence suggests that it was abandoned probably before the roof caved in.

Hermitage 44 appears to have belonged to a single monk, but one of importance in the Naqlun community, as indicated both by the spaciousness of the complex, the developed domestic facilities (unit A) and mysterious hall D. It seems beyond doubt that the resident was a literate man; a used *kalamos* and the inscriptions on the pottery are relevant proof. Two Coptic parchments and one receipt in Greek discovered in unit A suggest that Phoibammon – the presumable name of the resident monk – was literate in both these languages. He also seems to have been a man of means.

⁴ W. Godlewski, T. Herbich, E. Wipszycka, Deir el Naqiun (Nekloni) 1986-1987. First Preliminary Report, *Nubica* I-II, 1990.

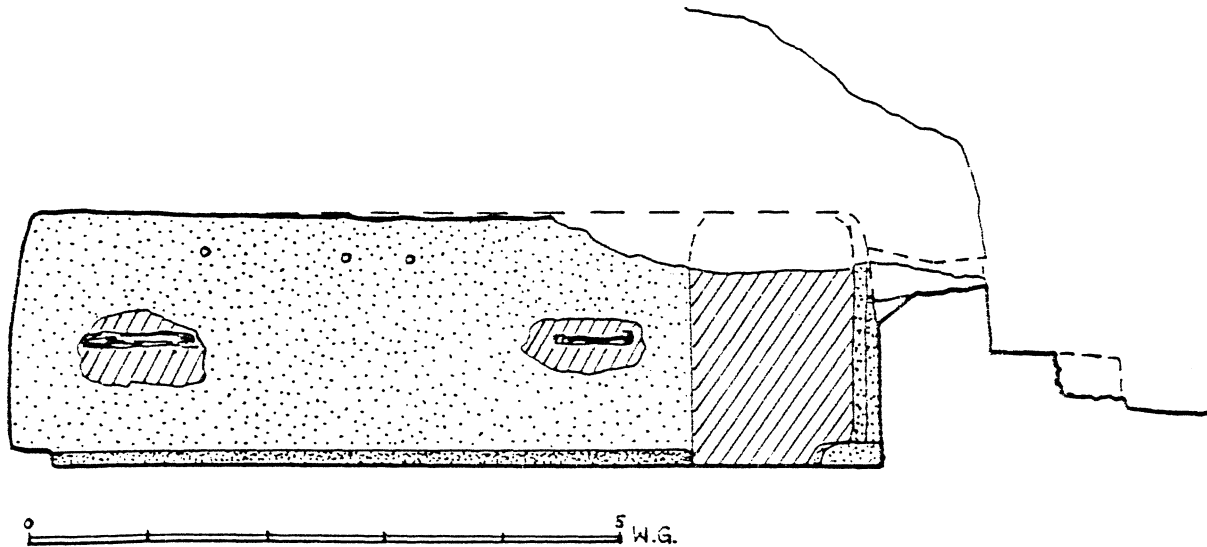


Fig. 3. Hermitage 44. Unit D, latitudinal cross-section looking north.
Drawing W. Godlewski.

A better understanding of the hermitage and its inhabitant will come with the exploration of unit G and the rubbish dump found east of the courtyard.

CHURCH OF ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

Apparently, all the remaining preserved paintings in the church interior were uncovered in the past season. A few still have to be protected and recorded in full. The following is a preliminary presentation of the entire set of paintings:

Apse:

- MA. 1 Christ in Glory, conch
- MA. 2 Apostles, on either side of grille, with inscription of the archimandrite Papnute⁵
- MA. 4 Mother of God and Child,⁶ central niche
- MA. 3 St Mark the Apostle and Evangelist, northern niche
- MA. 7 Enthroned saint (St Athanasius?), southern niche
- MA. 8 Cross, between the northern pilaster and the niche
- MA. 9 Cross, between the northern and middle niches
- MA.10 Cross, between the middle and southern niche

North sacristy:

- MZNN. 1 Five standing figures, only lower part preserved, north wall
- MZNS. 1 Archangel (?),⁷ south wall
- MZNE. 1 Drawing in the eastern niche

South sacristy:

- MZSN. 1 Archangel,⁸ north wall

⁵ Dr. Adam Łajtar is responsible for the identification and reading of this inscription.

⁶ Two other wall paintings were to be found in the niche; they have been tentatively identified as Mother of God (?) and the Cross.

⁷ A similar composition probably existed on an earlier coating of wall plaster.

⁸ Same remarks as for MZNS.1.

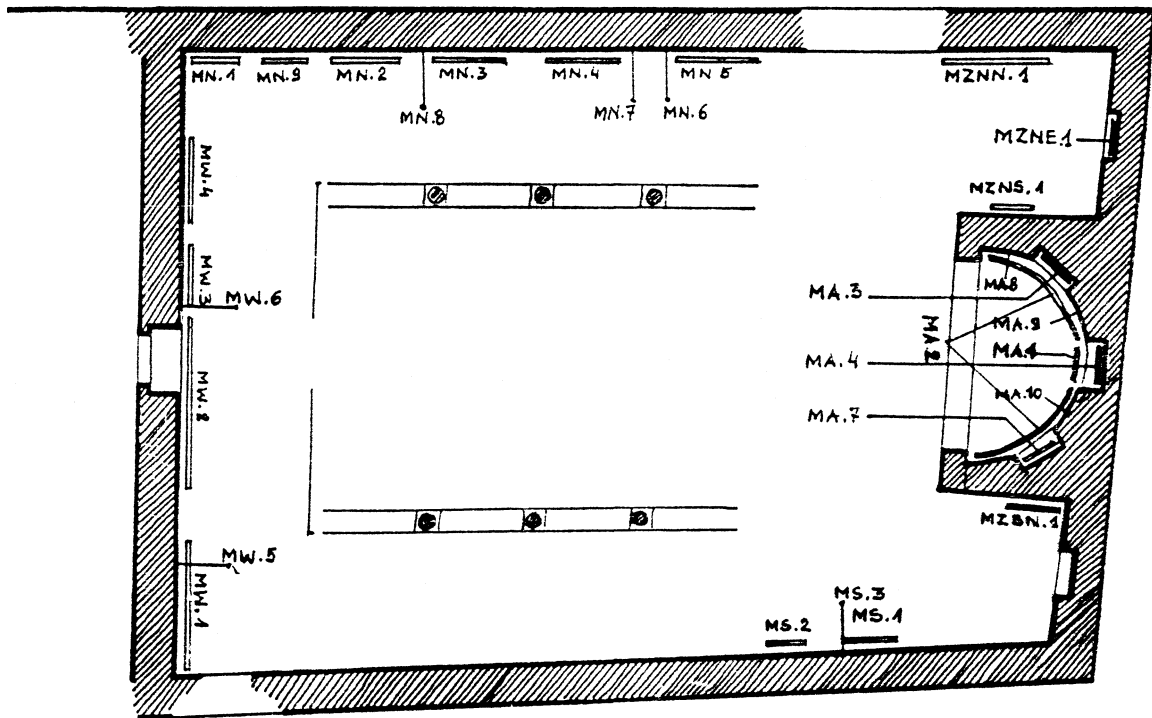


Fig. 4. Church of Archangel Gabriel, 11th century, location of particular compositions.
Drawing W. Godlewski.

Naos, west wall, starting from the south:

- MW. 1 Mother of God enthroned between the Archangels
- MW.2 St. Pichoshe and unidentified saint (?), both on horseback, the second one damaged⁹
- MW.3 Cosmic Cross with Christ in the center
- MW.4 St Claudius (?). on horseback
- MW.5 Cross with velum, bottom register, below the archangel
- MW.6 Saintly monk enthroned, bottom register, below Claudius

North wall of naos:

- MN. 1 Saintly archimandrite (Shenute?)
- MN. 9 Painted fragment (?)
- MN.2 Saint Georgios (?), on horseback
- MN.3 Archangel Gabriel
- MN.4 St Merkurios on horseback
- MN.5 St Theodoros Strathelatos (?), on horseback
- MN.6 Saintly monk, bottom register
- MN.7 Fragment, bottom register
- MN.8 Fragment, bottom register

South wall of naos:

- MS. 1 Saint on horseback, fragment
- MS.2 Anchorite Simeon the Stylite with two figures
- MS.3 Christ and an apostle (?), fragment of composition

The paintings inside the church, possibly with the exception of the archangels in the two sacristies, were produced in the early 11th century,¹⁰ between 1022 and 1032. Bishop Isaac of

⁹ The two riders were depicted antithetically inside a single frame.

¹⁰ The paintings in the apse, and possibly in the whole church, were painted in the period between the death of Caliph al-Hakim (1022) and the death of the Patriarch Zacharias, who is mentioned in the foundation inscription in the apse.

Aphroditopolis visited the church in 1033 and left a Coptic commemorative inscription in the apse which was already covered with murals at the time.¹¹

It is highly probable that the artist who created these compositions left his mark to the right of the cross with velum on the west wall.¹² So, the Naqlun paintings can be attributed to Deacon Ioannes from Heracleopolis Magna.

PAINTING CONSERVATION

The conservation program, which has been implemented since 1991 on successively discovered wall paintings, included: removing superimposed layers of secondary plastering, structural reinforcement of the ground, replacing putties and progressive surface cleaning. In 1996, detailed examinations were made of the current state of preservation of particular murals with special focus on final treatment involving an aesthetic color integration program.

West wall

Current works completed the conservation of two compositions started in 1993: *Maiestas Domini* on the Cosmic Cross and the warrior saint Claudius on horseback. The dirty and sooty lower sections of the murals were cleaned chemically (using a water solution of ammonium carbonate and vinegar), revealing additional elements of the composition. The minutely cracked and blistering plaster has been reinforced with a 30% solution of Primal AC-33, the voids being filled with lime mortar (slaked lime chalk, sifted sand and Vinavil). The same mortar has been used as a putty to fill in small surface losses and as a final layer of the earlier fillings. Pigments mixed with Primal were brushed over this smooth white and level plaster. The kind of color integra-

¹¹ The text of this inscription has been preliminarily discussed in: W. Godlewski, *Naqlun 1993-1996*, *JCS III* (in press).

¹² K. Urbaniak-Walczak, *Drei Inschriften aus der Kirche des Erzengels Gabriel in Der an-Naqlun im Fajum*, *BSAC 32*, 1993, 161-163.

tion selected with respect to this painting is known in conservation terminology under the Italian term *aqua sporca* or "dirty water".

North wall

The disintegrating process of the painted layers on this wall, caused by rain water and salt efflorescence, has been cut short following the renovation and reconstruction in 1994 of the structures adjacent to this wall. The murals were subjected to a repeated minute examination from the point of view of conservation. It was found that after a recent remodeling of the roof combined with a new pitching, the painting in the eastern end of the wall (St Theodoros?) was spattered all over with bitumen spots. Mechanical and chemical means were employed to remove the spots and to clean the surface once again. In some places it was necessary to replace rough putties and replaster the coarse surface. Color integration completed the final treatment.

North sacristy

A renovation of the sanctuary in 1995 uncovered two mural fragments (bottom parts of a number of standing figures on the north wall and an archangel on the southern one) that were now subjected to a full conservation treatment including cleaning, consolidation and color integration.

All the stages of the conservation process were recorded by means of color photography.