

NAQLUN

EXCAVATIONS 1997

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The 1997 season of excavations and conservation lasted from September 1 until the end of October.¹ The fieldwork concentrated in three separate sectors of the ancient and medieval monastery and was a continuation of earlier research.²

HERMITAGE 44

Hermitage 44 is located in the northeastern part of the monastic complex, c. 1.2 km away from the contemporary monastic buildings. The work carried out in 1995 and 1996 had led to the uncovering of two courtyards, H and I, and three extensive

¹ The Mission was directed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski and included: Mr. Tomasz Górecki, archaeologist and ceramologist, Ms Maria Mossakowska, archaeologist, Mr. Christian Gaubert, arabist, Mr. Tomasz Herbich, archaeologist and geophysicist, Mr. Helmut Becker, geophysicist, Mr. Jorg Fassbinder, geophysicist, Mrs. Ewa Parandowska, conservator, Mrs. Teresa Żółtowska, photographer, Mr. Marek Puzkarski, draftsman, Ms Katarzyna Fila, student of conservation, Mr. Cristobal Calaforra-Rzepka, student of conservation, Mr Artur Obluski, student of archaeology, Ms Iwona Antoniak, student of coptology. The SCA was represented by Mrs. Atka Abdallah Hassanin and Mrs. Magda Abdallah Goma. Thanks to the assistance of the SCA, both in Cairo and in the Fayum, the fieldwork proceeded smoothly and effectively. For this the Mission is grateful to Dr. Abdalla Attar and Mrs Magda el-Khouly. The Mission is also grateful to the monks from the monastery of the Archangel Gabriel in Naqlun for their unfailing hospitality and assistance on all occasions.

² W. Godlewski, E. Parandowska, Naqlun. Excavations 1996, *PAM* VIII, 1996 (1997), pp. 88-97; K. Urbaniak-Walczak, Naqlun. The literary texts from seasons 1993 and 1995, *PAM* VIII, 1996 (1997), pp. 98-102; T. Derda, K. Urbaniak-Walczak, P. Naqlun inv. 10/95: Greek excerpts from a liturgy with their Coptic translation, *JJP* XXVI, 1996, pp. 7-21; E. Wipszycka, Les rapports entre les monastères et les laures à la lumière des fouilles de Naqlun (Fayoum), *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 52, 1996, pp. 372-403; T. Derda, Papirusy z Deir el-Naqlun a Codex Alexandrinus, *Chrześcijaństwo u schyłku starożytności. Studia źródłoznawcze*, ed. T. Derda, E. Wipszycka, Warszawa 1997, pp. 11-62.

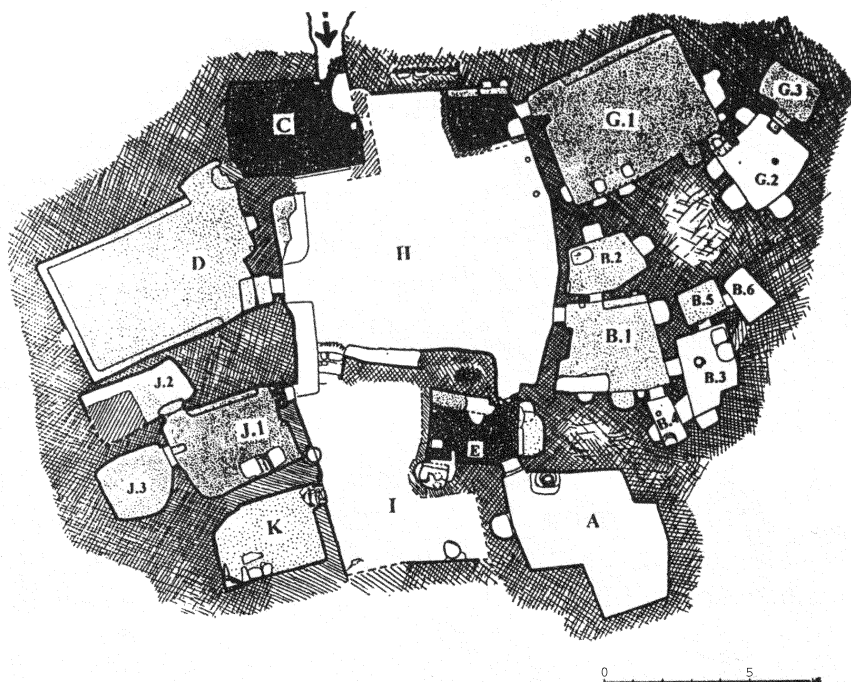


Fig. 1. Hermitage 44. Plan W. Godlewski.

groups of rooms, A, B and D, together with the entrance vestibules C and E, and a small vestibule F which leads to unit G, identified earlier, but excavated only now. The main objective of investigations in 1997 was to clear the entire hermitage and to study the stratigraphy. In the opinion of the excavators, Hermitage 44 could well turn out to be the oldest and the most interesting of the hermitages discovered so far at Naqlun. The last season was devoted to exploring unit G, which consists of three rooms in the northwestern corner of court H, and J to the west of courtyard I, as well as room K to the south of unit J and a small kitchen entered from room E.

UNIT G

The unit is made up of three interconnected rooms of different size, different finishing and function. All the rooms were cut in the soft sedimentary rock. Rectangular room G.1, the biggest in the unit, measuring 4.45 x 5.60 m, has been preserved only in the lower part. Large sections of the roof and upper parts of the walls were found in the fill. The room had a fine mud plaster on the walls and the floor was covered with a thick layer of mud mixed with cut grass. It had a low narrow bench by the north wall and a deep pit in the southwestern part. A number of niches pierced the walls: two small ones in the south wall above the pit and a big one level with the flooring by the entrance to G.2. The niche in the west wall, in line with the pit, was connected probably with the unpreserved window that opened onto the courtyard. The east wall was pierced by a big niche which became wider inside, presumably intended for prayer, and above it a niche for setting up a lamp. The furnishings of the room are typical. What is interesting is their condition, especially of the storage pit which – for the first time in Naqlun – was found together with the covering. The pit was narrow (0.70 m) but very deep (2.30 m) and rather long (1.65 m). The permanent covering consisted of a thick layer of mud flooring, identical with that found throughout the room, laid over the pit on wooden beams. Two openings at the ends of the pit (34 x 40 cm and 42 x 50 cm) permitted access to it. The pit had been cleared before the room was abandoned and was only partly filled with gravel when the upper parts of the walls caved in.

In the southeastern corner of room G.1, the entrance to the next room was located. This room was much smaller (2.60 x 2.50 m) and cut in the rock on a lower level. Steps facilitated access to it. Room G.2, which was 1.80 m high, was furnished with several niches cut in the unplastered walls. One of the niches contained a Coptic magic text written on a piece of parchment. In the center of the room, large cooking pots were found sunk into the walking

level and covered with a ceramic *mortarium*, undoubtedly produced in Egypt. Pierced in the eastern wall was a small square entrance (60 x 60 cm) leading to room G.3 cut in the rock some 0.80 m above the walking level in G.2. A small step by the wall facilitated access to it. The room itself was finely plastered, small (1.28 x 1.98 m) and low (0.80 m). It appears to have been the hermit's bedroom. The arrangement of the three rooms recalls that of some of the underground hermitages at Esna, repeated to a certain degree twice in Hermitage 44, in unit B and in unit J, although with some modifications.

UNIT J

The set of three rooms was cut in the rocky valley slope off the west side of courtyard I. The eastern part of the biggest room, J.1, was built of dressed blocks of stone and brick and its eastern wall was founded on a destroyed furnace which belonged to the earliest stage in the use of hermitage 44. Room J.1, which measures 3.00 x 4.00 m, was equipped with a bench by the northern wall and a pit in the southeastern corner (measuring 0.62 x 1.52 m, 1.92 m deep). This pit was also originally covered with a mud flooring laid on palm tree beams preserved in place. The inside of the pit was filled with gravel, pieces of rock and pieces of the flooring. The condition of the edges of the pit is such that it is impossible to be sure whether in this case there were also two openings in the covering, but the arrangement of the central beams clearly suggests their presence. An entrance in the northwestern corner of the room gave access to a much smaller room J.2 (1.40 x 3.50 m) which did not have any plastering on the walls, while the floor was on a lower level than inside J.1. The gravel filling the western end of this room was not explored in view of the danger of the roof caving in. The upper layers of the fill in the explored part of the room yielded a piece of papyrus with a text in Arabic.

A small room J.3 was entered through a doorway in the western wall of J.1. It measured 2.30 x 2.20 m and was 1.00 m high,



*Fig. 2. Archive of Girga ben Bifam. Documents on paper.
Photo W. Godlewski.*

cut rather roughly but originally finished with mud plaster. It was presumably a bedroom. Access was aided by a small step below the entrance. The entire unit J seems to have been prepared rather hastily and its slightly different arrangement, compared to unit G, appears to have been imposed by the condition of the sedimentary rock, which is particularly fractured in this area.

ROOM K

The room which is found south of unit J was built almost entirely of stone blocks and silt with the exception of the rock-cut western wall. The roofing consisted of mats. It was accessible from courtyard I and was doubtless made concurrently with unit J. To judge by the rough finishing and the large quantities of mats and storage vessels found inside it, the room surely served domestic purposes. A donkey was kept in it for some time.

KITCHEN

In the southwestern corner of room E with its cobblestone floor, in a small niche cut in the rock, a two-hearth stove, con-

structed of pottery, silt and stones, was discovered. The meals for the inhabitants of the hermitage were presumably prepared on it.

Tableware brought to light in the excavations, including imports from Tunisia and Cyprus, as well as coins, confirm the early dating of the hermitage in the second half of the 5th century. Consequently, it is the oldest hermitage to have been discovered at Naqlun so far. The plan and the construction technique evidently indicate that there were two stages in its construction. Originally, it consisted of courtyards H and I, of which the first served strictly as a passage to various areas and the second was used for domestic purposes (with two bread ovens), and units A, B, G and D, all of which were preceded by vestibules with cobblestone floors. Two of these, B and G, were dwelling units. G was inhabited presumably by a monk named Phibamo, to judge from an inscription on one of the bowls found in the niche of the vestibule. Living in the other unit was another hermit, probably Phibamo's disciple. It was the rule that the younger of the inhabitants occupied a space closer to the kitchen, which in this case was located in room E, also serving as a vestibule to room A, a large storage room with a small silo cut into the floor. The biggest room, D (7.10 x 4.40 m) with benches lining three of the walls, was different and probably served the monks from nearby hermitages as a meeting hall and a place for receiving visitors. Three Coptic magic texts were found in the hermitage, together with a *kalamos* and a small bronze spoon (*cyathiscomele*), suggesting that the monks from Hermitage 44 were involved in treating the sick and in preparing magic formulas.

After some time, units G and D were destroyed and filled in with falling rock. The sedimentary rock in this area has a very low cohesiveness. It seems that unit G was used for a very short period and was abandoned rather hastily. In room G.2, the bronze spoon mentioned above and a few coins were left behind. After

the roof had caved in, room D served for a while as a place to discard broken pottery. Then unit J and room K were constructed off the west side of courtyard I. In the second phase, therefore, the hermitage consisted of units A, B, J and K and was inhabited also by two hermits. The fragility of the rock, however, did not permit the monks to live there for long and they probably abandoned it already in the beginning of the 6th century. The small scrap of papyrus with a text in Arabic, found in the fill of room J,2, was evidently brought in by the wind – it was found immediately under the ceiling of the room. Hermitage 44 appears to have been occupied by two generations of monks, but after Phibamo's death its role was never again quite what it had been in the first stage.

KOM: SITE E

Excavations on the kom were very limited in extent. The modern monastery development and, particularly, the building of a precinct wall cutting across the archaeological site made it imperative to proceed with rescue excavations on the spot of the massive pillars of the enclosure wall, which had destroyed in several places the existing architectural remains and deposits containing important archaeological material: pottery, glass, wood and fragments of texts. Trench E was an extension of one of the foundation trenches, located between the earlier trenches dug by the expedition on site A, with the remains of a 6th century monastic tower and a late church built most probably in the 10th-11th centuries, and on site D with its two monastic towers encircled in the 10th century by an extensive habitation compound. Parchment cards found on this site constituted parts of several dozen Coptic codices, suggesting the existence of a monastery library in this part of the buildings. On site E, three building phases were identified. The oldest phase, just above the level of bedrock in this area, was connected with the construction of a sizable red brick building of unidentified purpose. It was destroyed in a fire. At a later date, part of the area was taken up by residential structures, possibly



Fig. 3. *The Apostles. Apse in the Church of Archangel Gabriel, left side. 11th century.
Drawing M. Puzkarski.*

connected with the buildings already uncovered on site D. One of the rooms yielded an archive consisting of over 50 texts written in Arabic.

Once the buildings were destroyed, the ruins served to bury the dead, undoubtedly Christians. The excavated area is presumably part of an extensive necropolis, possibly from the late 19th century, identified earlier on site A.

ARCHIVE OF GIRGA BEN BIFAM

The archive was found inside a large storage vessel (N.97.63) closed with a finely woven cover of palm leaves and grass (N.97.66). The vessel was surrounded by a structure which was situated in the corner of the room and filled in. The texts included 20 parchment rolls and 18 paper cards, frequently written on two sides, separately wrapped in textiles. The entire archive was placed in a leather bag. All the texts were written in Arabic in the office of a notary at Lahun; they are notary acts concerning the purchase of allotments of arable land and houses in the nearby region of Fayum. Part of the texts are receipts for money loans. Most of the texts are dated. It can be assumed that all the texts in the archive came into existence in the late 10th and 11th century. The circumstances of the transfer of this archive to the Nekloni monastery are unknown, but one should note the coincidence in time between the archive and the rebuilding of the monastery and the refurbishing of the Church of the Archangel Gabriel. The new paintings inside the church can be dated to the 1020s and 1030s.

CHURCH OF THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

Documentation and conservation work continued in the church interior. Attention was mostly devoted to the paintings inside the apse. Conservation work has practically been completed and the final touches have been given to the preserved paintings. The only mural to require additional conservation is the depiction of the Enthroned Mother of God and Child inside

the central niche of the apse. A decision is needed as to the form in which it should be preserved. The painting is undoubtedly part of the apse decoration program, but was superimposed on earlier paintings preserved inside the niche. These earlier murals are the only remaining church decoration from before the early 11th century. Preliminary investigations have shown two superimposed layers of earlier murals in the central niche of the apse. The oldest composition represents a triumphal cross recalling in form and detail the crosses from the prayer niches at the hermitages in Kellia. The later of the two earlier murals depicted a bust of Christ.³

³ W. Godlewski, *PAM VIII*, 1996 (1997), p. 93, no. 6. This mural was tentatively identified as Mother of God.