

# Włodzimierz Godlewski

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## Deir El-Naqlun, 1992

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## DEIREL-NAQLUN, 1992

### Włodzimierz Godlewski

This season of excavations and conservation lasted from October 6 until November 6, 1992.<sup>1</sup>

Fieldwork was concentrated in three separate sectors of the ancient and medieval monastery and was a continuation of earlier research: site B, an extensive rubbish dump in the southern part of the kom, site D in the northern part of the kom and the interior of the Church of Archangel Gabriel.

#### SITE B

In 1986 and 1988 an extensive trench had been dug here, over 20 m long and 3.50 m wide. In the present season the trench was extended another 6 m to the north. The site is a vast rubbish dump containing refuse and debris, as well as a considerable array of discarded objects, once in daily use at the Nekloni monastery complex.

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<sup>1</sup> The Mission was directed by Prof. Włodzimierz Godlewski and included: Jarosław and Agnieszka Dobrowolski, architects; Tomasz Derda, papyrologist; Tomasz Górecki, archaeologist-ceramologist; Ewa Parandowska, conservator; Małgorzata Redlak, arabist; Joanna Szczepkowska, archaeologist. The Egyptian Antiquities Organization was represented by Mr. Muhammad Ahmed Abd el-Halim. Students of archaeology Małgorzata Lipińska, Magdalena Żurek and Zbigniew Stępień also participated in the excavations.

Thanks to the extensive assistance of the EAO, both in Cairo and in Fayum, the fieldwork proceeded smoothly and effectively. For this the mission is grateful to Dr. Fahmi Abd el-Alim and Ms. Magda el-Kholy.

The mission is also grateful to the monks from the monastery of the Archangel Gabriel at Naqlun for their lasting hospitality and ready assistance when needed.

In the extension of the trench dug this year two large deposits of amphorae were discovered: the vessels were carefully stacked in horizontal layers. The most frequently represented type, the "chocolate" amphora, is dated to the first half of the 7th century. On the shoulders of some of these amphorae there were short inscriptions in black ink, presumably referring to the contents. At present it is difficult to explain why the vessels were stacked in these particular spots.

Pottery dominated the findings: storage vessels, cooking pots, tableware coming from Aswan workshops as well as from regions in Middle Egypt. Fragmentarily preserved glass from the monks' cells include fragments of lamps used presumably in *polycandelions*, sherds of small vessels, bottles, bowls and cups (which are the most characteristic and the most numerous group in the assemblage beside the lamps). The majority of these objects as well as stone lids and lamps and terracotta lamps can be dated to the late 6th century and to the 7th and 8th centuries. It is a rare object that could be dated to a later time, such as a fragment of a container with painted decoration on the shoulder, depicting a cross adored by two birds.

The papyrus documents in Greek (letters and administrative texts(?)) are also dated to the 6th-7th centuries.<sup>2</sup>

On the eastern side of the trench a large 15 x 14 m area was cleared down to a hard floor made of lime mortar on a bedding of debris. The floor was laid on the levelled surface of the dump and was used in connection with two rooms just barely

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<sup>2</sup> See paper by Tomasz Derda, below, p. 49.

preserved at its northern edge. On the floor surface there appeared marks which looked like a bed for a large circular object 2.50 m in diameter (possibly the bottom stone of a large quern). The rest of the "courtyard" was presumably roofed, to judge by the bases and holes left after the removal of the wooden beams supporting the structure of the roof. One of these bases was a well preserved limestone capital which could be dated to the early 6th century.

The purpose of this complex remains unclear, and the date of its construction is still to be determined. The floor rests on a rubbish dump from the 8th century, but it could well have been constructed in modern times (18th-19th century). It is undoubtedly the last phase in the habitation of an area which was ruined and abandoned by the monks already in Mameluke times (14th-15th century).

## **SITE D**

The extensive complex of the monastery, the eastern side of which was investigated in earlier seasons, continued to be excavated toward the north and west. Rooms D.11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 were uncovered and dated to two different phases of this vast building, which was undoubtedly storied and served as living quarters on the upper floor and as storage and domestic quarters downstairs.

Rooms D.12-14 belonged to the oldest phase of the structure. The building was rectangular in plan with an entrance from the east. The doorway had stone jambs; the door itself was blocked from the inside by a beam, to judge by a hole in a side wall 1.70 m deep, which must have nested such a beam when the door was open.

A courtyard (D.15) separated this structure, which extends further to the west, from another complex (D.18), of which the southeastern corner has been uncovered so far. Judging by the foundations made of irregular limestone blocks and the thickness of the walls (1.20 m) this building must have been a monumental and important structure in the monastic complex. What purpose it was intended for, as well as the date of its construction, are difficult to determine as yet. Doubtless it came into being before the 9th century and it must have been contemporary with the complex of rooms D.12-14 which were enlarged some time in the 9th-10th century, to judge by the pottery evidence as well as a golden coin, doubtless Ayyubid, found in room D.11.

#### **CHURCH OF ARCHANGEL GABRIEL**

The northern wall of the church underwent conservation and architectural documentation.

The research indicated three definite phases in the church's existence. In the original phase the northern wall of the presumably basilical structure was decorated in the lower register with a number of limestone pilaster bases and capitals, dated to the 6th century and obviously taken from an earlier church. These elements of architectural decoration were placed in a wall of red brick at regular intervals, possibly indicating the presence of six window openings. In the upper part of the wall two of the windows were traced; the remaining windows are presumably blocked, concealed under murals today.

In the 12th century the church was probably completely renovated. A *hurus* was introduced before the sanctuary and the windows were blocked with the exception of the two traced

in the upper part of the wall. The northern entrance to the church was opened at this time. The wall was covered with a new plaster and decorated with a number of wall paintings in its upper part.

The season was devoted to recording and protecting. The depiction of a saint on a horse is found on the west of the wall, presently inside the naos of the church (which is now on the northern wall). The mural is extensively damaged, but the saint's legionary dress is discernible. The saint is holding a spear in his raised right hand; a cross is mounted on the top of the spear and there are two angels on either side of his head. The angels are presenting him with a martyr's wreath. To the right of it there is a composition showing an archangel painted frontally, with a spear in his right and a globe in his left hand. This is presumably a representation of the patron of the church. Further to the east of the archangel, St Merkurios is depicted, mounted on a horse and holding a spear, two swords and a bow and arrows in a quiver.

There can be no doubt that all three compositions are by the same artist or group of artists who executed the paintings recorded and protected last year (Mother of God enthroned between two archangels and St Pičoše) and this year in the spring (St Abba). All are dated to the second half of the 12th century or possibly just a little later, considering the similarities of composition between the Naqlun paintings, especially the mounted saints, and analogous depictions from the church inside the monastery of St Anthony on the Red Sea, dated there to the 1230s.

The Coptic inscriptions which accompany the murals are mainly prayers, unfortunately very fragmentarily preserved.

There are also Arabic and Coptic graffiti, scratched or painted by pilgrims visiting the church. Unfortunately, they do not contain any dates.

All the finds from this season's fieldwork have been placed in a modern storage space prepared for the mission at Deir el-Naqlun.