

# Włodzimierz Godlewski

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## Naqlun: Excavations, 1998

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# NAQLUN

## EXCAVATIONS, 1998

Włodzimierz Godlewski

*The 1998 season of excavations conducted by an expedition from the Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University lasted from September 11 until October 22.<sup>1</sup>*

*The excavations<sup>2</sup> were carried out only on the kom extending behind the modern monastery of Deir el-Malak Gubriel, on three sites in different parts of the ancient monastic complex:*

- *Site D, in the northern part of the monastery, where the straggling monastic compound continued to be explored;*
- *Site E, in the central part of the kom, where the abandoned trenches under the monastery enclosure pillars dug in 1997 were enlarged;*
- *Site F, in the southeastern part of the kom, where a small trench was dug to verify the results of geophysical surveying in 1991-1992.*

*Additional work was also carried out inside the Church of the Archangel Gabriel in order to verify and complete the documentation, and in the expedition stores on particular objects, especially the Coptic and Arabic texts and the textile fragments and glass vessels. Also the Arabic and Byzantine coins have been studied by Ms Corinne Morisot and Dr. Barbara Lichocka and the basketry by Dr. Willemina Z. Wendrich.*

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<sup>1</sup> The mission was directed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski and included: Dr. Jacques van der Vliet, coptologist (University of Leiden); Misses Magda Żurek, Maria Mossakowska, archaeologists; Mr. Christian Gaubert, arabist (IFAO); Ms. Barbara Czaja, Messrs Radosław Głowacki, Artur Obłuski, students of archaeology. The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Mr. Ibrahim Ragab.

Thanks to the assistance of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, both in Cairo and in Fayum, the fieldwork could proceed smoothly and effectively. The Mission is also grateful to the monks from the monastery of the Archangel Gabriel in Naqlun for their lasting hospitality and assistance on many occasions.

<sup>2</sup> W. Godlewski, Deir el Naqlun. Topography and tentative history [in:] *Archeologia e papiri nel Fayyum* (Siracusa 1997), pp. 123-145. W. Godlewski, *PAM IX, Reports 1997* (1998), pp. 77-86; Ch. Gaubert, Remarques préliminaires sur les archives d'époque fatimide d'une famille copte, *PAM IX, Reports 1997* (1998), pp. 87-89.

In the western part of the complex which originally consisted of two towers (DB.I and DB.II)<sup>3</sup> the southern one of which was later developed to include other rooms forming an extensive storied habitation complex, two new rooms were uncovered: D.28 and D.29. Several others were observed further to the northwest of this structure (D.30-D.32) [Fig. 1].

Room D.28, which is accessible from D.22, was located on the main axis of the building and appears to have closed the complex on the west. It was a big room measuring 5.00 x +4.50 m; however, the southern and western walls have survived

in remnants. The northeastern corner contained a big basin (3.04 x 1.20 m) built of red brick and finely faced with mortar on the inside [Fig. 2].

A rectangular depression (62 x 40 m) was to be found in the bottom of the basin which falls slightly to the west; it was used to remove waste water from the basin. Two short parallel walls, plastered like the rest of the pool, were located by the west wall. They appear to have served as the mounting of some installation. The pool was accessible from inside room D.28 through the entrance, which was 60 cm wide and had a threshold only 8 cm elevated above the

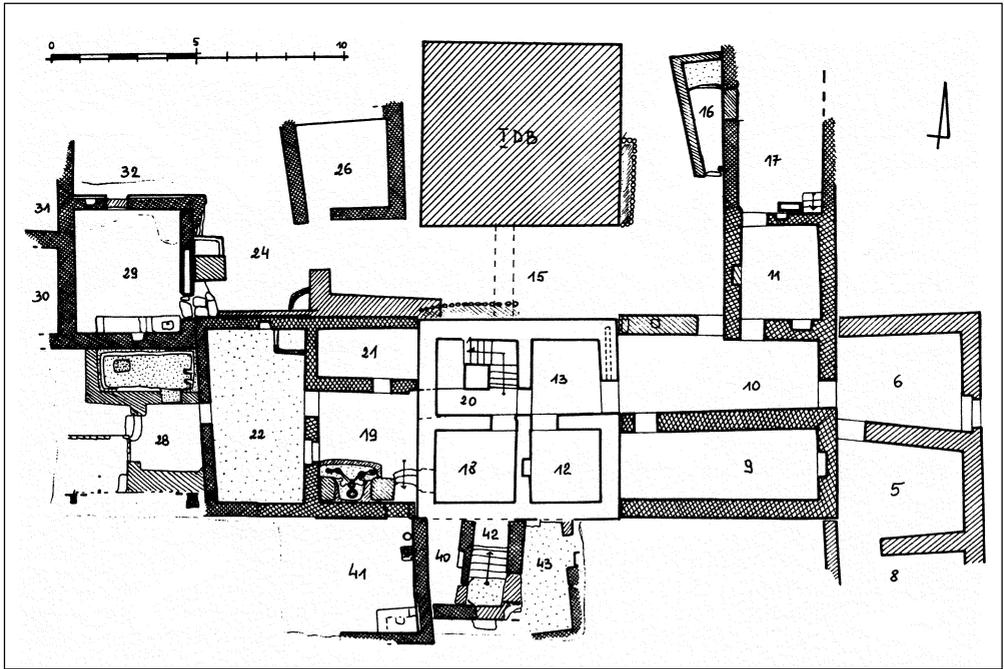


Fig. 1. Site D. Plan of architecture explored in 1998: rooms D.28-D.31 and D.40-D.43 (Drawing W. Godlewski)

<sup>3</sup> Godlewski, Deir el Naqlun, op. cit., p. 132, fig. 8.

floor of the basin. It could not have been a bathing pool, therefore, but must have served some function connected with soaking. Undoubtedly, room D.28 was functionally interconnected with D.22 and D.19, which also had mortar floors; furthermore, D.19 had a water container set up on a special stand by the south wall with canals in the floor and hollows to collect spilt water. From D.19 the southern end of the courtyard could be entered; a rubbish dump was cleared here and found to contain considerable quantities of scraps of pressed papyrus used as the filling of codex covers. The finds look like waste from a binding workshop, suggesting the idea that the three rooms, D.19, D.22 and D.28 might have

been part of a scriptorium located on the first floor, a place where the codices were bound. Numerous codex cards discovered in the fill of these rooms appear to confirm this assumption, as do also the codex covers found in the courtyard (D.24), north of room D.22.

From the courtyard D.24 an entrance led to a small room, D.29, measuring 3.55 x 4.26 m. It had a solid wooden door with an inside lock in the form of a wooden beam 186 cm long, sliding into a slot in the eastern wall. A similar blocking of the entrance had been recorded in the southern of the two towers (DB.II). The only furnishing of this wall was a structure by the south wall, distinguished by a large storage vessel



*Fig. 2. Site D. Room D.28 with basin, view from the west (Photo W. Godlewski)*

(pithos) built into it horizontally. The purpose of this design is hardly clear; it may have been used to hold valuable objects of some kind. The fill in this room, other than the rubble, contained quantities of crumbling overtired brick and ashes, presumably from a small oven uncovered in the south-eastern corner of the courtyard (D.24). Ceramic grillwork, possibly coming from this oven, was also found. There is no clear evidence what the oven had been used for, no produced goods or waste objects nearby, next to the oven or elsewhere in room D.29. Could the oven have also been part of the binding workshop? Perhaps it was used to make the metal fittings and to heat tools used in decorating leather codex covers. This suggestion is based on the idea that the neighboring rooms (D.19, D.22 and D.28) had indeed served binding purposes.

To the south of the southern tower (DB.II) excavation work was carried out in rooms D.40-D.43, bringing to light two occupational levels. Originally, the area was a courtyard for domestic activities, yielding big storage vessels and quantities of fiber rubbish, including papyrus documents in Greek and Coptic, surviving in fragments, as well as the mass of pressed papyrus scraps, with writing mainly in Greek. Quite a large collection of Aswan tableware was also discovered here.

In a later period, presumably in the 10th or 11th century, a staircase was erected by the south wall, with well-preserved wooden steps perhaps leading to the upper floor of the tower (D.42). The western part of the area, which was surrounded by a wall, remained a domestic courtyard operating in connection with Room D.19.

## SITE E

In the central part of the monastic complex, where the Girga ben Bifam archive had been uncovered in 1997, to the northwest of the monastery tower (Site A), a big trench was dug, clearing some 100 sq. m. The area had been used heavily for different purposes throughout the long history of the Nekloni monastery, from the 6th to the end of the 19th century. In this part of the monastery, tower A (excavated in 1986 and 1987) was definitely the oldest structure.<sup>4</sup> The monastic establishment must have been located to its west and surrounded by a wall, the corner of which was discovered on Site E. This wall was made

of brick; it was 75 cm thick and has survived to a height of c. 1.20 m in places. The wall joined the northwestern corner of the tower and about 3.00 m to the north it changed direction for a westerly one. A 9 m section of this wall was cleared. On the inside of the wall (to the south), the area remained free of any architecture until the 8th/9th century, as indicated by the pottery found in its southern end. The habitations inside the walls were located presumably at some distance from them. This is suggested by an important monastic structure, possibly a church, existing to the west of tower A. On the external, northern side of

<sup>4</sup> W. Godlewski, T. Herbich, E. Wipszycka, *Deir el Naqlun (Nekloni), 1986-1987: First Preliminary Report, Nubica I/III*, 1990, pp. 181-188.

wall E, the presence of structures on a layer of rubbish outside the fence wall was recorded. Three walls were found to join wall E at right angles; they are doubtless later. The entire architecture in this area was completely destroyed, obviously burned, leaving considerable quantities of ashes. The golden coin found in the ashes is a denarius of al-Mutamid and suggests a date for the destruction in the end of the 9th century. The area to the south of wall E was heavily filled with debris.

An extensive architectural complex was erected on the ruins of earlier structures; it

developed along an E-W axis to the north of the still existing tower A. The building was identified only in its southeastern part and its five rooms served different purposes. The biggest eastern room was inhabited and it is here that Girga's archive was discovered in a big storage jar set into the floor in the southeastern corner at walking level. Most of the documents from the archive are dated to the late 10th and early 11th century, so it is highly probable that the entire structure was built in the 11th century.

The western part of the structure was more domestic than anything else in nature. In one of the rooms, a small cellar was discovered, measuring 160 x 90 cm; in another unit nearby animals, presumably donkeys, were kept.

On the south side of the building, in the passage between the structure and Tower A, as well as west of the tower five tombs were discovered. They were equipped with finely plastered rectangular stepped superstructures with a semicircular finish on top. The tombs respect the position of the building containing Girgi's archive and that of the tower which had served as a church in this time. There is, however, no evidence to date the tomb superstructures. While undoubtedly earlier than the 19th century cemetery situated in this part of the kom, they can be dated most probably to the latest period in the operation of the Nekloni monastery, that is, the 13/14th century.

A vast 19th century cemetery had been recorded in the area of the ruined and abandoned monastery already in 1986 (Site A). The deceased were buried in coffins made of pieces of wood or palm leaf mid-ribs (jarids) with no superstructure to mark the spot.

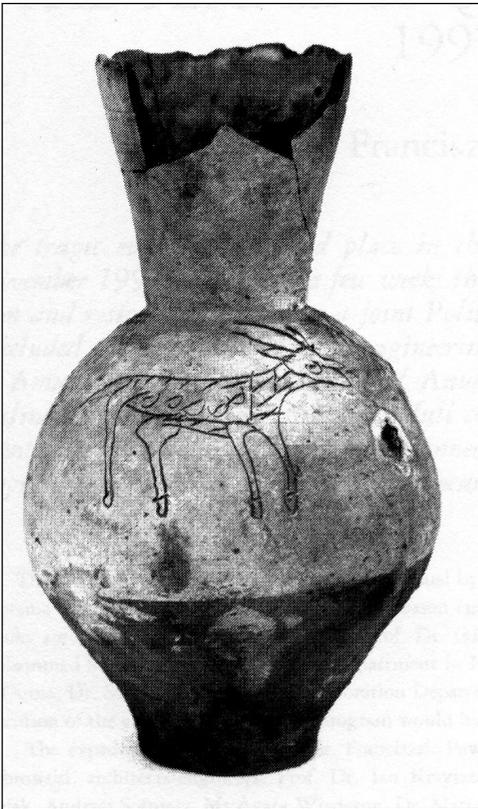


Fig. 3. *Qulla*. (Nd.98.095)  
(Photo W. Godlewski)