

# FINAL REPORT

January 1, 2011 – December 31, 2011

“Conservation and Documentation of the Wall Paintings at the Red Monastery, Sohag”

Dr. Elizabeth Bolman

Sub-grant No. EAC-29-2011 / EAC-31-2011

The Egyptian Antiquities Conservation Project (EAC)  
USAID Agreement No. 263-A-00-04-00018-00

Awarded to

THE AMERICAN RESEARCH CENTER IN EGYPT (ARCE)

Address: 8700 Crownhill Blvd. Suite 507, San Antonio, TX 78209 Tel: (210) 821-7000

by the

USAID Program Office of Productive Sector Development / Office of the Environment  
USAID / Egypt

December 2011

In collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development and the  
Egyptian Ministry of State for Antiquities



**TABLE OF CONTENTS**  
**FINAL REPORT, SPRING 2011**  
**4 – 15 APRIL, 29 APRIL – 21 MAY 2011**

**CONSERVATION AND PUBLICATION OF THE  
LATE ANTIQUE AND MEDIEVAL WALL PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE IN THE  
RED MONASTERY (DAYR ANBA BISHAY), SOHAG**



Table of Contents	1
I. Abstract and Acknowledgements	2
II. Wall Painting Conservation:	3
A. Conditions at the Beginning of the Project	3
B. Conservation	4
III. Site Management	4
IV. Archaeological Survey	7
V. Scholarly Study & Progress on the Book	14
VI. Conclusions	15

*Cover illustration: Dr. Emmanuel Fritch and Darcy Hackley, discussing the archaeology of the nave.*

*Table of Contents Illustration: Inscription above head of Apostle, MAΘAΙΟΣ (Matthew). East apse, Ascension Scene. Photograph: E. Bolman.*

## I. ABSTRACT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This is a project to clean, conserve, document (with photographs and technical drawings) and publish the wall paintings in the so-called Red Monastery (Dayr al-Ahmar), also known as the Monastery of St. Bishay. The monastery is located outside of the city of Sohag. The paintings date to the late antique and medieval periods, and are of great significance for our understanding of Coptic art, late antique art in general, and also the continuation of the classical tradition. We are also studying the architectural envelope for the paintings, the liturgical significance, and the history of the monument.

This report documents the archaeological survey work and study season that took place between 4 – 15 April, and 29 April – 21 May, 2011. Principal staff on site were the Project Director, Elizabeth Bolman, Directors of Conservation, Luigi De Cesaris and Alberto Sucato, Assistant Conservator Emiliano Ricchi, Laurel Darcy Hackley, William Lyster, Father Emmanuel, Paul Dilley, Nicholas Warner, Father Maximous El-Anthony, Gillian Pyke and Louise Blanke.

The work completed during this campaign is one part of a larger project to conserve and clean all of the late antique wall paintings in the eastern end of the church. Work on this project was begun with test cleanings in 2002. This campaign was unusual in that we did not undertake any actual conservation, because the larger campaign was cancelled due to the Revolution. A smaller group came to the site for a shorter period, to conduct an archaeological survey of the remains exposed outside of the church, and to undertake study and commence writing chapters for the book we are publishing on the Red Monastery church.

All work is being carried out in collaboration with the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities. The team is particularly grateful to Dr. Zahi Hawass, Dr. Mohammed Ismail, Dr. Mustaffa Amin, Dr. Mohammed Abdel Rahim, Mr. Saad, and our inspectors Mr. Gaber Ahmed Hafez, and Mr. Dahi Mahmoud Ahmed. The Coptic Church is providing exceptional support and hospitality. Thanks to Pope Shenouda III and Bishop Yohannes, and to Father Antonious and Father Wissa, as well as all of the monks and staff of the Red and White Monasteries, for their efforts on our behalf. The success of this project would not be possible without the vision, hard work, and patience of the staff of the Egyptian Antiquities Project and the American Research Center in Egypt. We wish in particular to thank Dr. Gerry D. Scott, III, Michael Jones, Janie Abdel Aziz, and Madame Amira. All members of the Red Monastery Project are greatly appreciative.



*Apostles, First Phase of Painting, Underpainting (Sinopia), with remnants of fourth-phase painting. East apse. Photograph: E. Bolman.*

## II. WALL PAINTING CONSERVATION:

### A. CONDITIONS AT THE SITE, AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT:

The wall paintings in the enclosed part of the church (the original sanctuary) are in various states of preservation. Many, especially those in the north and south semi-domes, were covered with layers of soot, dirt and varnish. Sections of the paintings were detaching from the walls and falling off. The majority of the paintings in the triconch and on the façade wall have now been conserved.



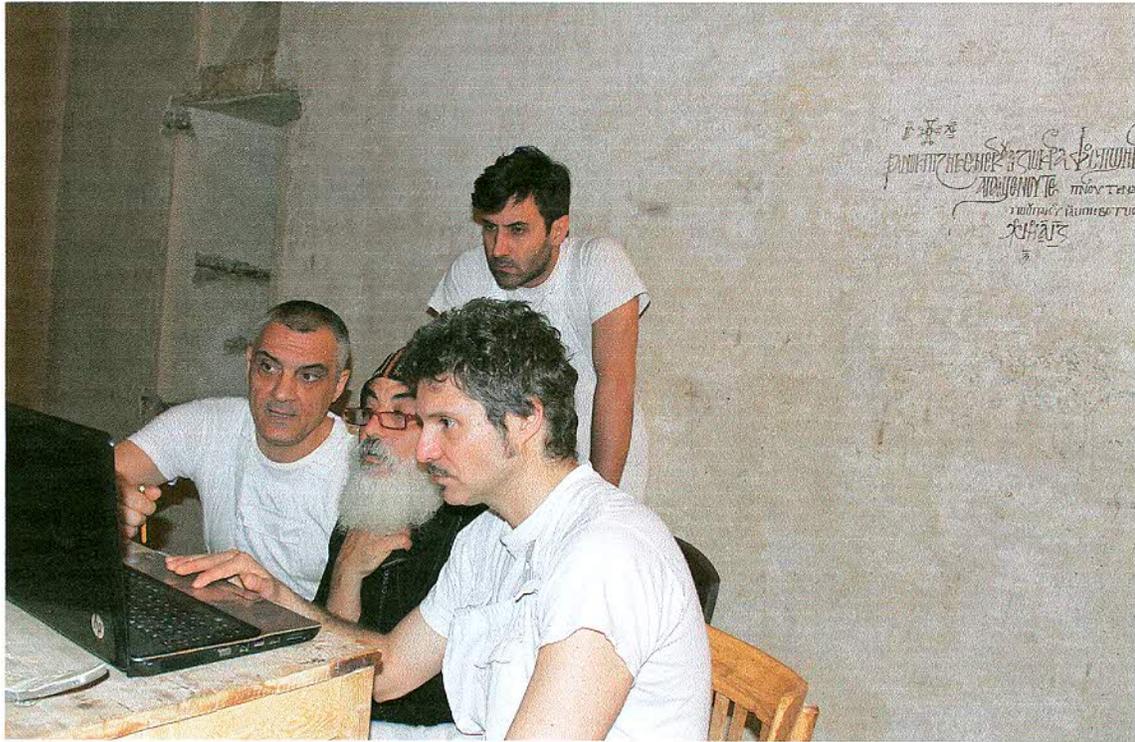
*East semidome with two test cleanings, showing the second and fourth phases of painting.  
Photo: E. Bolman, May 2010.*



*East semidome conserved, showing the second and fourth phases of painting.  
Photo: E. Bolman, December 2010.*

## B. CONSERVATION:

No in depth conservation took place this campaign. The principal focus of the head conservators was the preparation of their contribution to the book being written on the Red Monastery Church. Only De Cesaris, Sucato, and Ricchi worked during this short study season. They discussed aspects of the plaster and paint layers, and issues relating to the chronology of the monument, intensively with Bolman, Lyster, Father Maximous and Father Emmanuel.



*Luigi De Cesaris, Father Maximous El-Anthony, Alberto Sucato (front row, left to right), and Emiliano Ricchi (standing at back), working on their book contributions.  
Photograph: E. Bolman, May 2011.*

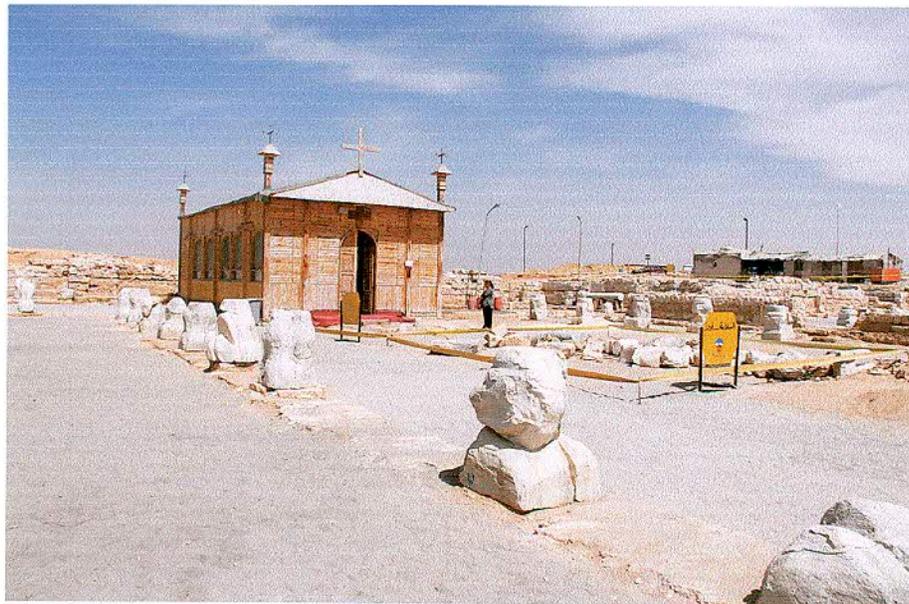
## III. SITE MANAGEMENT:

Warner gathered information necessary for the preparation of a site management report. He discussed a range of issues relating to the use and protection of the monument with Bolman, Lyster, Mr. Saad of the Antiquities Department, and Father Antonius, Abbot of the Red Monastery. Lyster and Bolman followed up site work with a meeting with Michael Jones.

The plans by Father Maximous and Father Antonius to reuse the late antique triconch as a church have been the source of significant concern to Jones, Bolman, Lyster, Warner, De Cesaris and Sucato. Specifically, the desire on the part of the Coptic monks is to tear down the medieval and Comité façade wall, and attempt to recreate the ancient basilica. The issues of destroying this wall and also risking damaging the medieval enclosure wall, if it is used to support a massive roof, are very serious ones. However, the completely unique and historically most important part of the monument, the late antique triconch sanctuary, would

be off limits to most male visitors if it is once again made into a sanctuary. Women would be completely denied access. The Coptic faithful and other visitors to the site would see a small fraction of the triconch – perhaps 15% – from well in front of it, in the ancient nave. Other factors to consider are the following: how quickly the soot of incense will obscure the paintings again (in perhaps three or four years); the fact that the eastern semidome shows two completely different images simultaneously, and the monks are already urging the repainting of one of them at the expense of the other for devotional purposes; and the inevitability of the decision on the part of Father Antonius to air condition the monument, despite the fact that he's been told several times that doing so would destroy the paintings within a few years. All other buildings in the monastery are air conditioned, including the perhaps 18<sup>th</sup>-century chapel dedicated to the Mother of God located within the ancient Red Monastery nave.

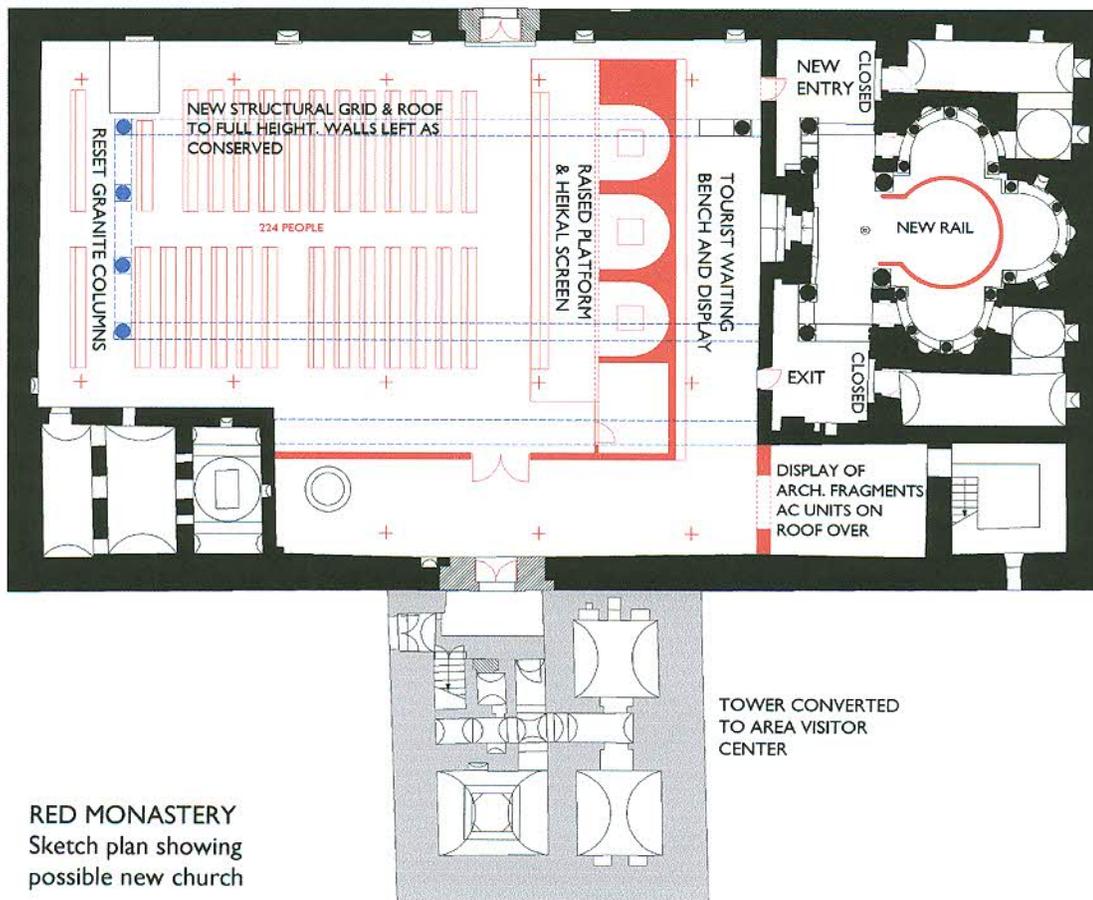
Mr. Saad, newly promoted to be the head of Coptic and Islamic Antiquities in the Sohag region, expressed directly conflicting points of view on the subject of the triconch being used as a church. In the first place, he asserted emphatically that it was against Egyptian law to rebuild the monument as a church. Immediately thereafter, he said that he would never tell any man, Muslim or Christian, where he could and could not pray. If Father Antonius were, for example, to install an altar in the ancient triconch late one day when no one from the Antiquities Service or the Red Monastery Project were around, and start using it for services, he would have totally outmaneuvered those concerned with the safety and longevity of the monument. A telling example of the delicacy of this kind of situation is the installation of an ugly wooden (air conditioned) church in the middle of the late antique basilica of the St. Menas Pilgrimage site. This unsightly church has been in place for over two years, making proper appreciation of the historical basilica impossible.



*Wooden church built within the sanctuary of the late antique pilgrimage church at St. Menas.  
Photograph: E. Bolman, May 2011*

The pressures to reuse the triconch as a church will continue well beyond our tenure at the site, and as a result of the political sensitivity of the situation, it is impossible to expect the Antiquities staff to protect it. After long deliberation, the solution that seems most workable for the long run is to build a new church within the now open-air nave, in front of the triconch sanctuary and its exterior façade wall. This would give Father Antonius a church

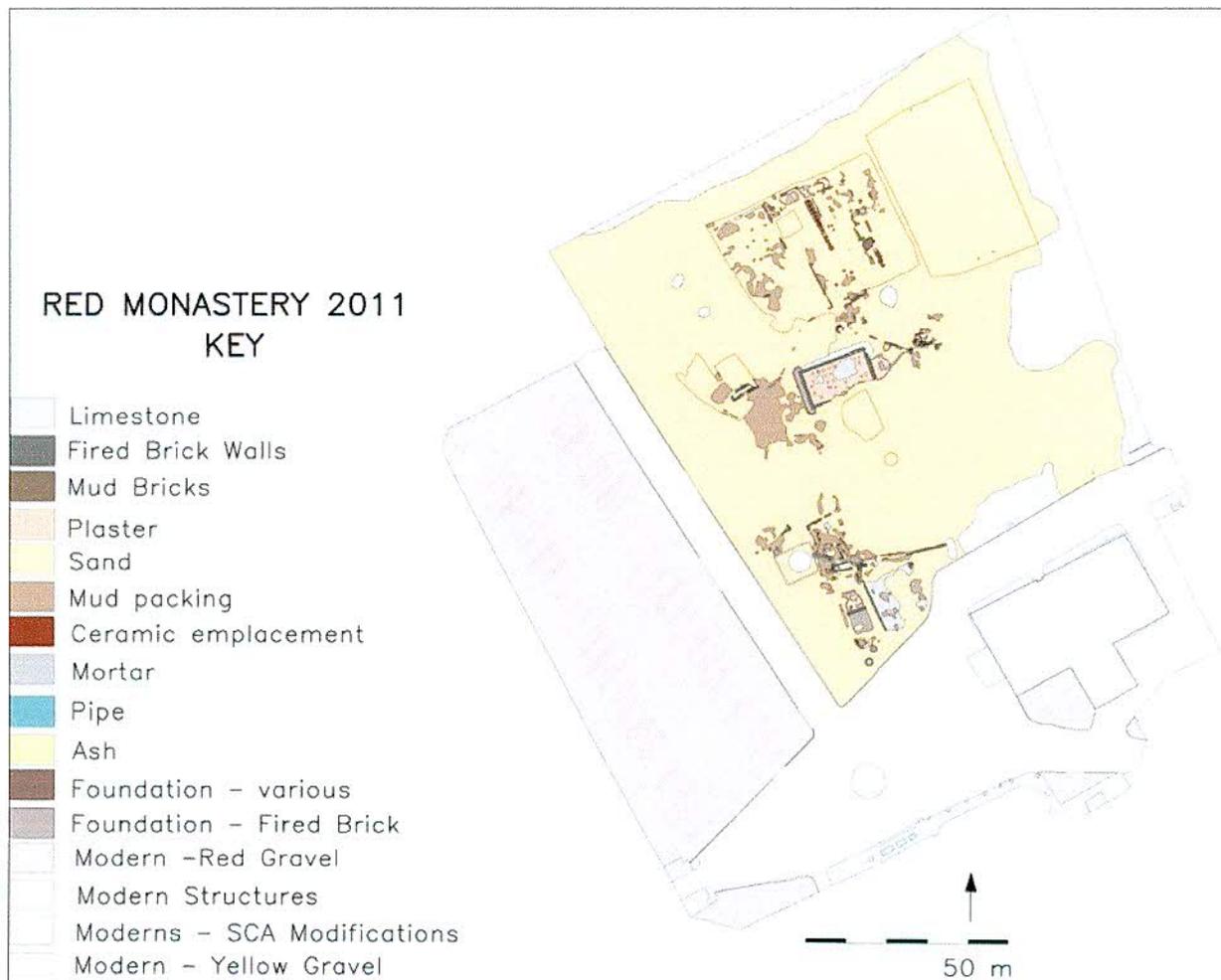
in close proximity with, but not attached to, the triconch. This historical area could be prepared for visitation, along with the qasr (to be used as a visitor's center with a raised viewing platform at the top). This plan would have the benefit of creating a roof to protect the medieval paintings now exposed on the inner western face of the nave wall. A mono-directional visitation plan could be implemented, beginning at the south nave door, and going into and out of the triconch at opposite ends. Warner has prepared a preliminary drawing visualizing this plan, and is working on a detailed Site Management Report, which he will deliver in June.



*Site Management Plan, Nicholas Warner, May 2011.*

The steps to make this happen are significant ones, but the future safety of the monument – the most important historical church in Egypt, and one of the ten most significant ones still in existence anywhere from late antiquity – is well worth the effort.

#### IV. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY



The objective of the survey was to map the archaeological remains and modern structures that surround the Red Monastery church, focusing on the excavations that were carried out by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) in 1992-1996, 2002-2003 and latest in 2009.

The survey consisted of five main components:

1. Mapping of modern and archaeological remains with a total station.
2. Written recording of all archaeological remains.
3. Photographic recording in overview and detail of all archaeological remains.
4. Ceramic survey.
5. Communication and information exchange with the local department of the SCA, responsible for previous archaeological work on the site.

#### Methodology

Using Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) coordinates, two survey points were set up using a hand held Global Positioning System (GPS). From these two points, the remaining survey points were laid out using a Total Station. Before the survey commenced, the archaeological remains were cleaned of sand and other windblown deposits.

For the purpose of recording and interpretation, the archaeological remains have been divided into five areas based on function, organization and layout. These areas are:

1. Areas associated with water installations in the immediate vicinity of the well.
2. An area to the south of the well defined by a series of plaster floors and subfloors.
3. The North West corner of the archaeological site.
4. The large central building.
5. The northernmost part of the archaeological site

### **Archaeological Remains adjacent to the Well**

The area that surrounds the well is characterised by a series of tanks and pipes collecting water for further distribution on the site. This is most evident on its eastern side, which is populated by several tanks and a large number of pipe fragments. On the north and west sides, only few architectural features have been identified. These include the corner of a single tank in the west end of the modern protective wall that surrounds the well along with a corner of another tank just north of the well. Both tanks are characterised by a thick waterproof plaster coating. The latter of the two contains a small pot, possible for collection and cleaning out remaining water.

East of the well, several ceramic pipes distributed water into at least four identified tank areas. Most of these tanks have been extensively dug out during the prolonged use of the area, but the size, shape of the cuts and location of the associated water pipes have enabled an identification of the uses of these spaces. The southernmost tank is, however, particularly well preserved and appears to have only been exposed to minimal robbing of re-useable building materials. This tank consists of a rectangular brick frame with a limestone floor in the eastern part and a raised plaster floor in the west. Both ends of the tank have been coated with a thick waterproof plaster. The two parts are separated by an upright standing limestone with holes cut into the top and bottom for continuous water flow. The upper of these cuts was intended to be closed off when needed as a slot on each side of the cut would enable the insertion of a blocking device. It is not clear whether the bottom hole also could be blocked off, as the water proof plaster that otherwise covers the stone, has been completely worn off in the area of the cut. A large limestone block immediately south of the tank appears to be related to the use of the area. It was originally incorporated into the wall surrounding the tank and has been worn smooth where it was exposed.

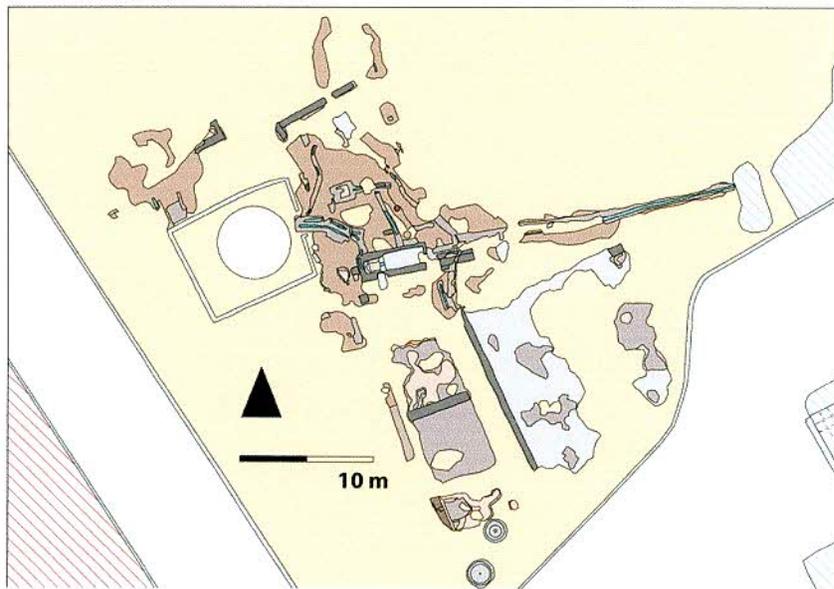
From the tank the water would flow east past a junction of five pipes joining up over a pot emplacement. Similar installations can be found among the White Monastery archaeological remains and are intended to either check the flow of the water or to block off particular pipes for an increased water flow in other pipes. From this point, the water was further distributed towards east and south.



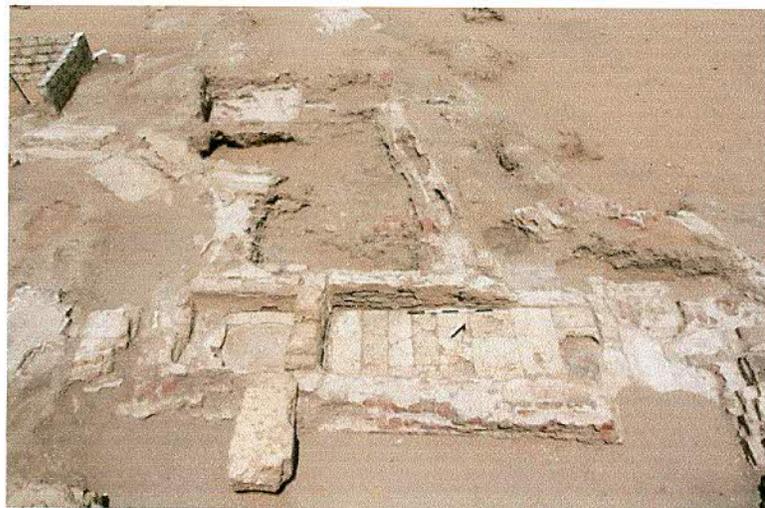
*Overview of area immediately east of the well.  
Notice robbed out tanks and pipes. Direction SW.*



*Limestone block separating eastern and western part of large southern tank. Notice slot for closing off water flow. Direction N.*



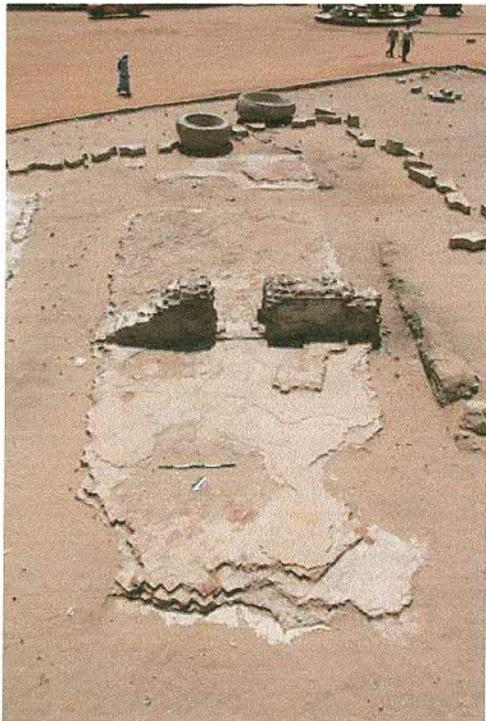
*Survey Map of area immediately adjacent to and south of the well.*



*South tank in area immediately east of the well. Direction NW.*



*Remains of subfloor in the south west corner of the archaeological site. Direction SE.*



The area to the south of the well is characterised by a series of floors and sub-floors that can be divided into three smaller areas. The most extensive of these covers an area approximately 13 by 13 metres in the south east corner of the archaeological site. It contains a packing made from stones, mortar, small sherds and bricks, supporting a fired brick subfloor with a plaster surface. The latter is only preserved in smaller patches along the eastern extent of the area. There is currently no indication of partition walls that would have divided the area into smaller rooms. This space is, therefore, currently understood as a single large room.

The western edge of the sub-floor is defined by a fired brick and mortar step. While this feature is too narrow to be a wall in its own right, the layout and sharp edge on the west side of the step suggests that it was built against a wall that has been completely robbed out to the extent where no traces remain. Examples of other steps of a similar sized

and orientation has been identified in the south west corner of the same area, abutting the large central building (see below) and in comparison a similar arrangement has been identified in the architectural remains of the White Monastery.

West of the sub-floor, remains of three rooms can be found. The two northern rooms are separated by a fired brick wall. The third room is located to the south and is distinguished by a different orientation in the layout of the fired brick subfloor. These rooms witness a prolonged use of the area and several remodelling over time. This is best represented in the northernmost room where at least three floor and subfloor sequences have been observed

This area does not appear to be connected to the activities relating to the extensive tanks and pipes that surround the well, but should possibly be considered in relation to the close proximity of the Red Monastery Church. Two granite presses are located in the southernmost part of this area. They are clearly not *in situ* in their original context, but should possibly be considered as removed from a production area within the Red Monastery.

#### **Archaeological Remains in the North West Corner**

The main archaeological feature in the North West corner of the site is an east-west orientated rectangular tank coated with waterproof plaster. The tank consists of a single row of fired brick frame surrounded by a double row brick construction. The south side of the tank is lined by a third brick construction. The eastern end of the tank has been robbed out and it is, therefore, not possible to determine the full extent of the feature in this direction. A crack in the east end has been repaired with a pink water proof plaster.

Other archaeological remains in this area include a few pipe fragments, areas of mud packing and a single line of fired bricks. These features are, however, not preserved to an extent where it is possible to incorporate them into the general interpretation of the area.

#### **The Central Building**

Among the site's main architectural features is a large building located in the centre of the archaeological area. The walls of the building are constructed from fired bricks and are preserved on the north, east and west side. On the south side, a large part of the wall is now lost revealing a section of the building's foundation. Remains of a plaster floor cover the majority of the building's interior space. Regularly spaced square impressions and remaining fired brick and pink plaster-mortar traces show that the floor-space was by no means empty, but it is not clear to what architectural element these impressions belong. They appear too abundant, small and closely-spaced to be piers, and their organisation is not consistent with, for example tables, benches or other furniture. The western exterior of the building is flanked by an architectural element with rounded projecting terminals.



*Overview of central building. Direction NW.*

A lower plaster floor and a single row step on a fired brick foundation abut the east wall the building. This floor is only partially preserved without any remaining traces of its outer boundaries. From this area plaster floor, remains of two pipe lines run towards the east. Although the connection of the pipe is now lost, it appears that they join and turn into a single channel running towards a small area consisting of several pot emplacements, tanks and a cistern.

The limestone cistern is set in a square room made from fired bricks. Three floor sequences suggest a prolonged use of the cistern with several modifications and remodelling of the immediate architectural surrounding. Cuts in the limestone block defining the south of the cistern opening possibly supported a lid that would have served to close the opening and avoid evaporation and unwanted faunal presences. Two pipes projects from the eastern wall of the room. The northern pipe has been lost while the southern feeds into a channel leading into a pot emplacement. The immediate context of these architectural features has been lost and the area does, therefore, not supply sufficient information to interpret its use.



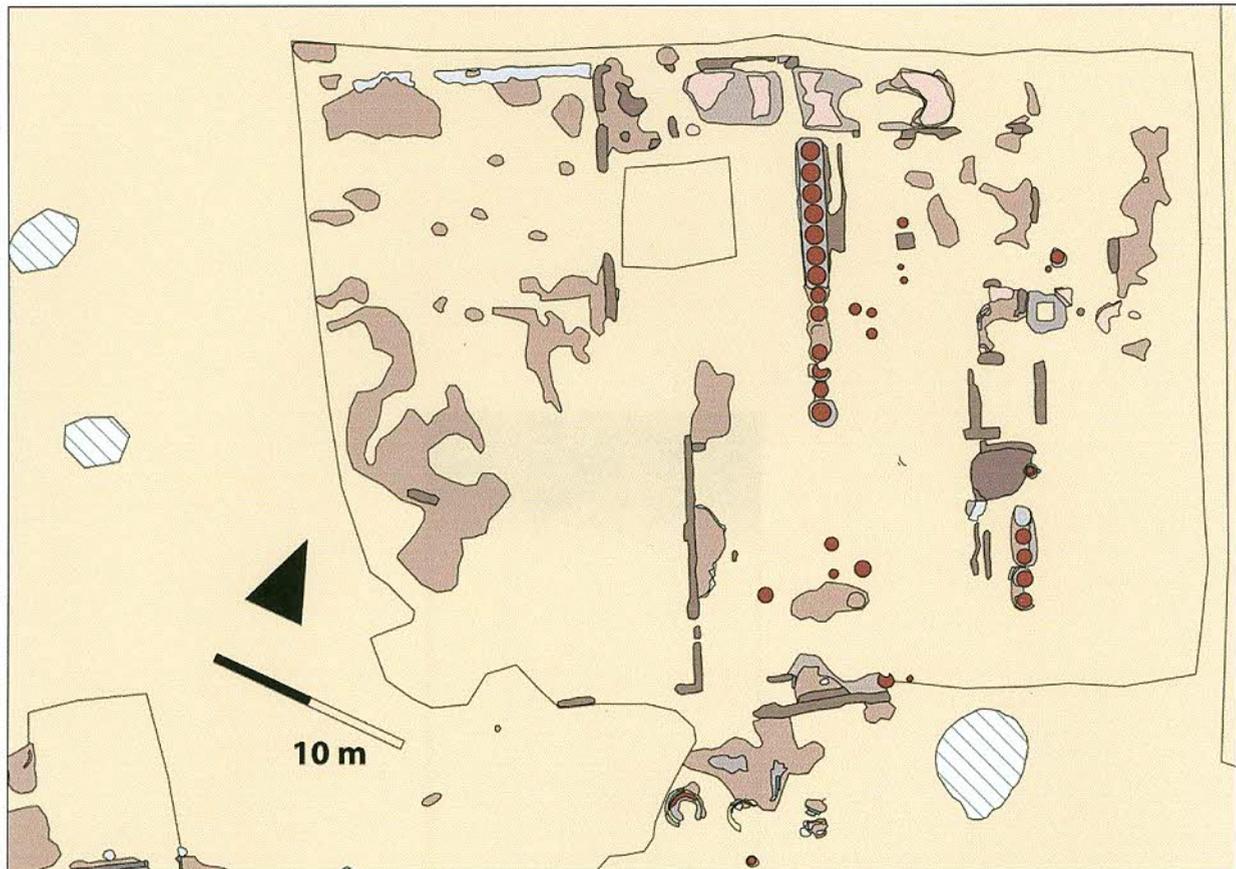
*Survey map of Central Building and surrounding features.*

#### **Archaeological Remains north of the Large Building**

The archaeological remains in the northernmost extent of the enclosed area are by far the most eroded. A closer study has, however, proved most informative for our understanding of the architectural organization of this part of the site. The western half of the area contains remains of a few mud brick walls and mud packing foundations suggesting a large space of some kind. Remains of a wall made from limestone boulders define the entire northern extent of the area. The architectural remains of the White Monastery contain evidence of several walls that were constructed on a foundation of uncut limestone boulders. These stones were, however, not remotely the size of the ones found in this particular wall. The size of the

boulders also implies a much larger wall than seen anywhere else in the Red Monastery remains. Based on the size and composition of this wall, it may be tentatively suggested that the composition of the wall would imply a northern monastic boundary.

The western half of the northern area contains several important architectural features. Two *tabuns* were identified in the southern end, possibly suggesting that at least a section of the area was dedicated to food production. A large number of storage vessels separate this area in function from its western counterpart. These are set into walls as well as emplaced into the sand. A total of 33 pot emplacements have been identified in this area. The orientation of a series of fragmented mud brick walls along the eastern and northern edge of this excavation area might suggest a spatial organization of a series of rooms organized around an open space. This is particularly evident by a tank made from fired bricks and the southern lying room, where the mud bricks clearly take up the space of two square rooms.



*Survey map of northernmost area. Notice large number of ceramic emplacements and remains of two circular tabuns in the south central end.*



*Room divisions in the east end of the northern excavation area.*

### Conclusion, Archaeological Survey

The 2011 survey season has concluded the mapping and recording of the archaeological remains at the Red Monastery. Several important observations have been made regarding the external division of the area. In summary these are:

- Similarly to the organisation of the White Monastery, the area immediately surrounding the well was dedicated to water collection and distribution with water pipes extending in all directions.
- A series of rooms south of the well implies a use that is not connected to water distribution.
- The spatial organisation of the northern part of the site should possibly be understood in terms of at least one or two adjacent buildings, of which the eastern appears to be arranged around an open courtyard.
- Remains of a limestone wall that spanned the full length of the north excavation area, has been suggested to be remains of the northern boundary of the monastic remains.

Further work will include architectural comparison to the White Monastery and to other monastic sites in the region in order to expand our understanding of the organisation and use of space as well as the use of specific architectural features.

### V. SCHOLARLY STUDY AND PROGRESS ON THE BOOK:

Four scholars and Father Maximous worked during this campaign. The scholars were Elizabeth Bolman (Project Director, Art Historian), Father Emmanuel Fritch (Archaeologist and Liturgical Historian), William Lyster (Art Historian), and Paul Dilley (Epigraphist). Bolman worked on three of the chapters she is contributing to the book on the Red Monastery Church. Bolman is the editor and chief contributor to the book. She was able to analyze the paintings and their various styles closely, and describe them. She also facilitated the work of the other specialists. Father Emmanuel examined the archaeological and architectural evidence for the liturgical use of the church. He visited the White Monastery Church to establish similarities and differences between the two. He created a document that reported in detail on his findings, and on questions that he was examining. The most significant of these was his realization, in conjunction with discussions involving De Cesaris, Sucato, and Bolman, that the late antique sanctuary screen was originally much higher than we had thought. Lyster worked intensively on his catalog of decorative motifs, taking some additional photographs, and studying the locations of the motifs in the church. Father Maximous met with one of the elderly priests who used to live in the White Monastery, to gather information about the recent history of the Red and White Monasteries. Dilley studied the inscriptions that have been cleaned and conserved since the last time he was on site, a year ago, as well as a few uncleaned but discernable ones, located in the southwestern corner of the nave, high up on the wall where a staircase used to exist. One of the most interesting of these is the following.



*"The poor Mercurius, painter. The (servant of?) the monastery of our father Apa Shenoute. God have mercy on him. Amen (and Amen). Era of the martyrs 1038." (=1322 CE)*

The painter Mercurius now appears in five Red Monastery inscriptions and one White Monastery inscription, of which this one has the latest date. He may have been responsible for the last phase of painting.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS:

We are planning two more campaigns of conservation work in the triconch. Once we have completed them we will hopefully move out into the nave to conserve the surviving paintings on the western and northern nave walls, to build a new church that respects the integrity of the existing monument but also serves the needs of the church, and to prepare the site for visitors.

Work on the Red Monastery book is progressing rapidly. Warner has already submitted one chapter, and has prepared substantial material for the chapters he is co-authoring. The conservators have begun seriously to grapple with the task of writing a chapter that includes a larger scope than their previous ones. Father Maximous has gathered new information about the recent history of the monastery. Dilley has refined his understanding of some inscriptions, and caught up with recording and translating the ones that have newly been revealed. Bolman has written parts of several of her chapters. Father Emmanuel had two long meetings with Warner (Bolman participated in the second of these). In combination with site work, these meetings advanced our understanding of the monument considerably. The close connections between the region of the Red and White Monasteries, and the larger Mediterranean world in Late Antiquity, continues to be demonstrated by our research on the conserved paintings. New evidence and perspectives on the building, paintings, and their history has come to light due to the work of conservators and specialists, underscoring the outstanding significance of the building and its paintings.



*Archangel Michael, East Apse, Fourth Phase of Painting, Red Monastery Church Triconch.  
Photograph: E. Bolman.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS REPORT: FALL CAMPAIGN 2011

### CONSERVATION AND PUBLICATION OF THE LATE ANTIQUE AND MEDIEVAL WALL PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE IN THE RED MONASTERY (DAYR ANBA BISHAY), SOHAG



#### Table of Contents

I.	Abstract and Acknowledgements	1
II.	Wall Painting Conservation:	2
	A. Conditions at the Beginning of the Project	2
	B. Conservation	2
III.	Preliminary Art Historical Discussion	3
	A. Eastern Lobe Niches, Ground Floor	
	B. Northeastern Corner Room Ceiling	
	C. Medieval Paintings (North Wall)	
IV.	Documentation	
V.	Death of the Director of Conservation, Luigi De Cesaris	
VI.	Conclusions	

*Cover illustration: Luigi De Cesaris, Alberto Sucato and Michael Jones in Conversation.  
Photograph: E. Bolman, December 2011.*

*Table of Contents Illustration: Ceiling, new quadrant conserved at right, NE corner room.  
Photograph: E. Bolman, December 2011.*



## I. ABSTRACT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is a project to clean, conserve, document (with photographs and technical drawings) and publish the wall paintings in the so-called Red Monastery (Dayr al-Ahmar), also known as the Monastery of St. Bishay. The monastery is located outside of the city of Sohag. The paintings date to the late antique and medieval periods, and are of great significance for our understanding of Coptic art, late antique art in general, and also the continuation of the classical tradition. Additionally, we are studying the architectural envelope for the paintings, their liturgical significance, and the archaeology and history of the monument.

This report documents the conservation work that took place between 21 November – 23 December, 2011. Principal staff on site were the Project Director, Elizabeth Bolman, Directors of Conservation, Luigi De Cesaris and Alberto Sucato, six Assistant Conservators, Laurel Darcy Hackley, William Lyster, and Father Maximous El-Anthony. Michael Jones, Associate Director of the Egyptian Antiquities Conservation Project also spent time on site. All technical supervision of the conservation work took place under the expert direction of Luigi De Cesaris and Alberto Sucato.

The work completed during this campaign is one part of a larger project to conserve and clean all of the late antique wall paintings in the eastern end of the church. Work on this project was begun with test cleanings in 2002.

All work is being carried out in collaboration with the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities. The team is particularly grateful to Dr. Mohammed Ismail, Dr. Farag Fadda, Dr. Mohammed Abdel Rahim, Mr. Saad, and our inspectors, for their generous and professional assistance. The Coptic Church is providing exceptional support and hospitality. Thanks to Pope Shenouda III and Bishop Yohannes, and to Father Antonious and Father Wissa, as well as all of the members of the Red and White Monasteries, for their efforts on our behalf. The success of this project would not be possible without the vision, hard work, and patience of the staff of the Egyptian Antiquities Project and the American Research Center in Egypt. We wish in particular to thank Dr. Gerry D. Scott, III, Michael Jones, Janie Abdel Aziz, and Madame Amira. All members of the Red Monastery Project are greatly appreciative.



*Coptic inscription reading: The Archangel Gabriel, eastern lobe, south niche.  
Photograph: E. Bolman, December 2011.*

## II. WALL PAINTING CONSERVATION:

### A. CONDITIONS AT THE SITE, AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT:

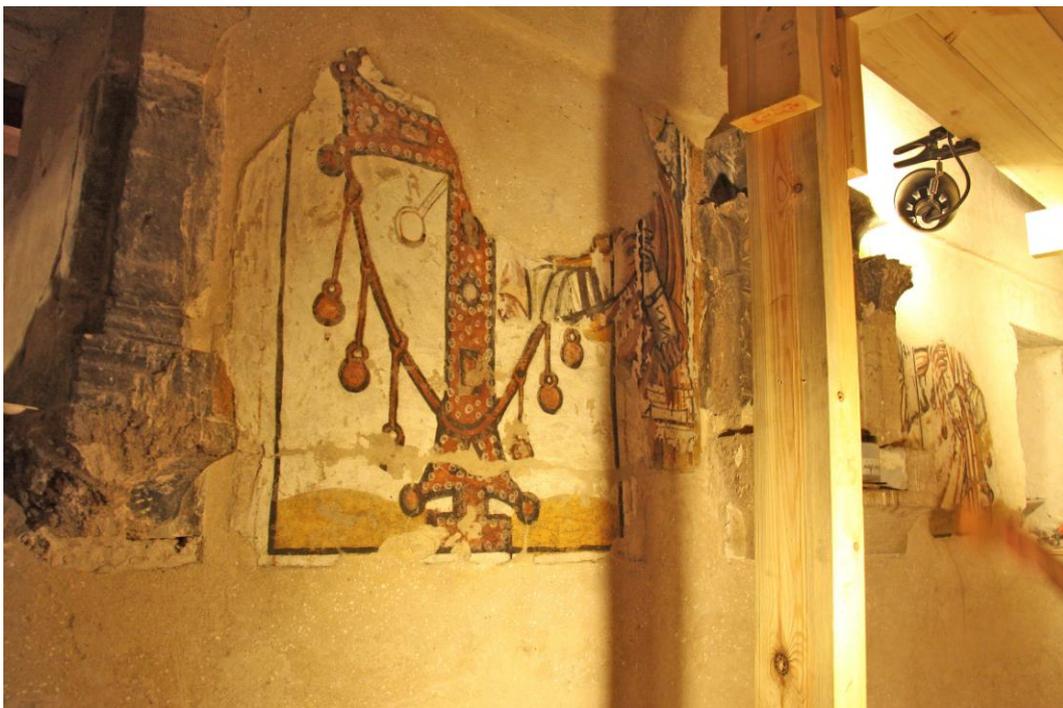
The wall paintings in the enclosed part of the church (the original sanctuary) are in various states of preservation. Many were covered with layers of soot, dirt and varnish. Sections of the paintings were detaching from the walls and falling off.

### B. CONSERVATION:

The work of conservation took place in four principal areas. First, the conservators worked in the three niches on the ground floor of the eastern lobe in the triconch sanctuary. They also cleaned and conserved a quarter of the ceiling in the northeastern corner room (possibly the original prothesis). They continued conservation of the Medieval paintings on the northern wall. And finally, they cleaned and conserved the majority of the inner western wall at the clerestory level, in the sanctuary. All of these areas proved to be of great interest.

The procedure is first to consolidate the paintings, then to clean them. After this, pictorial integration is undertaken, and finally the protection and conservation of the wall paintings. The long-term strategy is to clean the entire interior space, not just the historical paintings. Our goal is also to present the paintings and space as well as possible, with special lights, and UV protective Perspex (transparent durable plastic) in the windows.

The work continues to confirm the conservators' previous analysis of the paint and plaster layers in the triconch as belonging to four major late antique phases of work in the church. Medieval paintings survive in fragments on the façade wall, and on the northern (transept) and western nave walls. These belong to two or possibly three different phases of work. Test cleanings were done on the inner western nave wall, showing close ties to the Medieval paintings on the façade wall.



*Cross (fourth phase) and remains of Prophets (third phase), western clerestory.  
Photograph: E. Bolman, December 2011.*

### III. PRELIMINARY ART HISTORICAL DISCUSSION

#### A. THE EASTERN LOBE NICHES, GROUND FLOOR:

The subjects at the backs of the niches at the left (north) and right (south) were completely cleaned and conserved during this campaign. They revealed impressive bust-length paintings of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. Due to stylistic parallels, particularly with the Virgin Mary *Galaktotrophousa* in the north semidome, it is clear that they belong to the fourth and final late antique phase of work in the sanctuary.



*Archangel Gabriel, south niche, ground floor level, east lobe. Fourth phase of painting.  
Photograph: E. Bolman, December 2011*

The Archangel Michael (left niche) holds a decorated round Eucharistic bread loaf. The Archangel Gabriel (right niche) holds a chalice. Both also grasp staffs. Remains of the third-phase painting appear underneath these later images, and suggest that the same subjects and sizes existed in these niches earlier. It is appropriate to find these two important archangels in the eastern lobe, due to the fact that, within the Christian system, they guard the

throne of the Lord (the altar) and participate in the celebration of the Eucharist. Angels typically flank the enthroned Mother of God and Christ Child in contemporary Egyptian Christian paintings (and indeed in those outside of Egypt as well), but without the explicit tie to the liturgy that the inclusion of the loaf and chalice create. Third-phase paintings of angels in the spandrels of the northern and southern semidomes also held liturgical implements, but these images were covered over during the fourth phase of painting. The new images on the ground floor of the eastern lobe bring the visualization of the liturgical process closer to the officiating priest and the altar.

The central niche is the most covered with soot, oil, and wax, and its conservation is very time consuming. Only the hood of the niche has, during this campaign, been partially cleaned and conserved. It reveals a bust-length depiction of the Virgin Mary, in the orans (praying) position. It is not possible at this point to ascertain what phase of painting she belongs to – late antique or medieval.

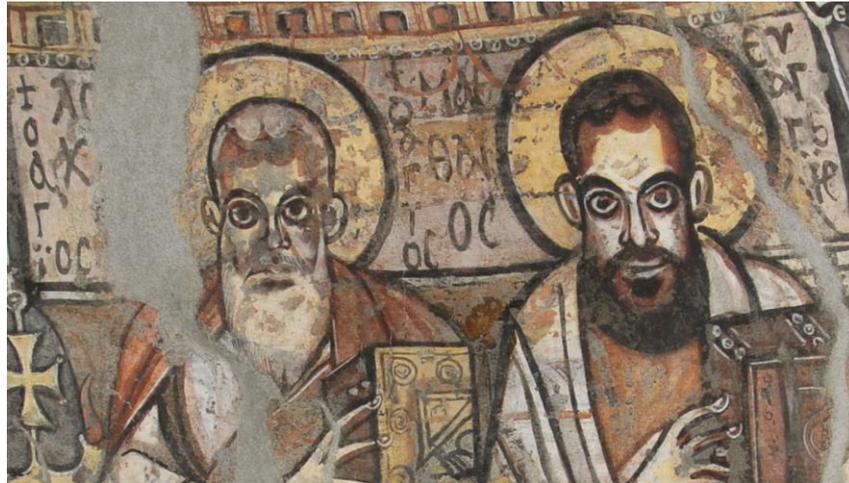
#### **B. THE NORTHEASTERN CORNER ROOM (NEC) CEILING:**

Half of the ceiling had been cleaned and conserved in an earlier campaign, and one more quarter of it was completed during this mission. As expected, because the composition is a regular one, the conservators revealed a large standing angel belonging to the fourth phase, (with traces of grape vines and a wreath underneath, belonging to an earlier period of work). The very faint traces of a set of scales of justice were discerned, underneath the fourth period work, suspended from the beak of one of the four eagles in a level of decoration below the large, later angels. More roundels of evangelists holding books and perhaps virtues were also uncovered, and belong to phase four.

The existence of four evangelists in this small room, and four evangelists in the south semidome, all painted during the fourth phase of work, raises the possibility of identifying the four figures in the NEC, who lack the painted names that accompany the figures in the apse painting. These duplications of subjects also provide an opportunity to examine a stylistic contrast indicating two distinct hands at work during this single period of work.

The NEC evangelists are in roundels, not full figured, and no traces of inscriptions remain. Since members of the same team painted both sets of evangelists, it makes sense that the appearance of the figures would be an indication of their identities. However, this turns out not to be the case, because two of the four figures in the NEC have white hair, while only one (St. Luke) does, in the south apse. Other variations in the depictions make it hard positively to identify the four in the NEC. (See the images on the next page.)

Stylistic differences are also pronounced, upon close examination. The fluid and confident line of the master who painted the four evangelists in the south semidome is quite different from the equally bold, but somewhat less well controlled line of the artist working in the NEC. The hands are completely different, with the ones in the semidome long and sinuous, while those in the NEC are short and awkward. However, the proportions of the heads, the size of the haloes, the shadows under the hairline, and other features make it completely clear that both painters belonged to the same team, with, overall, a recognizable style.



*Evangelists Luke and Matthew, South semidome, Triconch. Photograph: E. Bolman.*



*White-haired Evangelist (Luke?).  
Photograph: E. Bolman, 2011.*



*Dark-haired Evangelist (Matthew?).  
Photograph: E. Bolman.*

### **C. MEDIEVAL PAINTINGS, NORTHERN WALL (WEST OF THE SANCTUARY):**

Work continued on the equestrian saint and surrounding inscriptions and graffiti. A small figure in profile, not very well preserved but clearly holding a sword, became visible after conservation. He was painted over the border, and faces the horse. Especially interesting is the overlap of the border of the equestrian painting on top of the adjacent painting of the cross (to the west). This demonstrates that the equestrian painting was added after the cross, and by implication, after most of the (as yet unconserved) paintings in the nave.



*Small figure facing horse, North wall, west of the façade wall. Photograph: E. Bolman.*

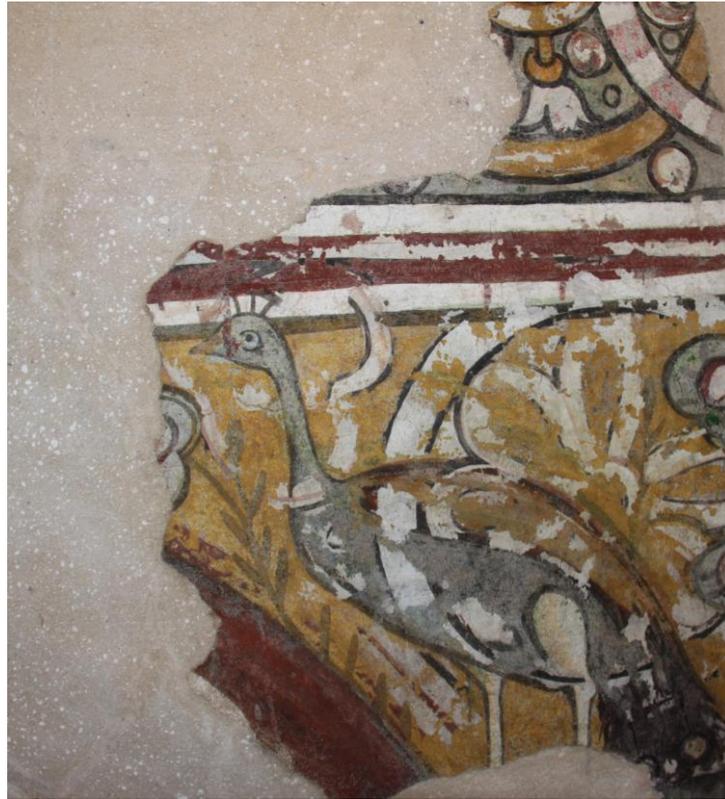


*Northern nave wall, within the Comité façade wall, showing the overlap of the border of the Equestrian Saint's painting on the painting of a Cross in an aedicule. Photograph: E. Bolman, December 2011.*

#### **D. THE WESTERN CLERESTORY WALL:**

This area is mostly, but not completely cleaned and conserved. Final conservation will likely take place during the next campaign (Spring 2012). Remains of third- and fourth-phase painting were found. Peacocks and a decorative motif belonging to the earlier of these two phases fill the spandrels of the monumental arch providing entrance to the sanctuary. These were clearly painted by the same artists who created the peacocks in the same location on the eastern spandrels framing the eastern semidome, and the peacocks on the ground floor level in the eastern lobe. Partial remains of three standing figures were also found, belonging to this period of work. They hold scrolls, suggesting that they are prophets rather than evangelists. Evangelists appear between the windows of the northern and eastern clerestory windows.

Unusual fourth-phase crosses, complete with strings of bells, originally covered the prophets. Painted crosses of this type are found at the Syrian Monastery in the Wadi Natrun, at Kellia, and at the Monastery of St. Katherine on Mount Sinai, among other important late antique sites. They are far more saturated than the rest of the fourth-phase decoration of this phase in the Red Monastery triconch, which tends towards black and white ornamental motifs. Instead, these crosses have rich gold backgrounds.



*Peacock (third phase), partially covered by fourth-phase decorative motifs.  
Photograph: E. Bolman, December 2011.*

#### **IV. DOCUMENTATION:**

Our project includes several types of documentation. We have taken photographs in several formats: digital images, slides, medium format transparencies, and also print (color and black and white). We also produce professional graphical documentation, showing stages of conservation work in great detail. During this campaign, Sergio Tagliacozzi came to work on the graphic documentation, and Jones, Bolman, Hackley, Lyster and the conservators all took digital photographs of the work in progress.

#### **V. DEATH OF THE DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION, LUIGI DE CESARIS**

Luigi De Cesaris died of a heart attack on 19 December 2011, at the very end of the campaign. Despite intensive efforts to save him by his team members, Father Antonious, and the emergency ambulance crew, he was dead upon arrival in the hospital in Sohag. The strenuous efforts of Alberto Sucato, Emiliano Ricchi, Michael Jones and Father Maximous meant that his body was taken to Cairo, to the Italian Hospital there, and then to the airport, in time to arrive in Rome relatively quickly. With the Western Christmas holiday, any delays would have meant that his body would not have arrived in Rome for over a week, rather than in four days.

His tremendous generosity and great teaching abilities mean that his legacy will continue, unabated, with Sucato and Ricchi now leading the team. His dedication to the project was phenomenal, and we would not have been able to complete this enormous project without his wisdom, energy and wide range of skills.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS:

The entirety of the north, east and south lobes, with the exception of small areas on the ground floor level of the east lobe, have now been consolidated, cleaned and conserved. The façade wall has also been conserved, and considerably more late antique painting has come to light in the northeastern and southeastern side rooms.

The close connections between the region of the Red and White Monasteries, and the larger Mediterranean world in late antiquity, continues to be demonstrated. New evidence and perspectives on the building, paintings, and their history has come to light due to the work of conservators and specialists, underscoring the outstanding significance of the building and its paintings. It is without question the most important historical church in Egypt, and one of the treasures of the late antique world.



*Luigi De Cesaris, east semidome, 9 December 2010. Photograph: E. Bolman.*