

FINAL REPORT

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

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INTRODUCTION

The conservation campaign conducted in the Monastery of St Bishoi (Red Monastery) at Sohag during the autumn of 2007 involved the following areas of the building: the south lobe of the triconch, which was completed during this mission; the first tier of the east lobe where work was begun on a broad horizontal band descending from the first cornice to approximately one meter above ground level; the north and south corridors where extensive test cleanings were carried out and parts of the south and west walls of the *protesis*¹. Work was also completed on the lower section of painted plaster in the corner between the east

¹ It will be remembered that for the purposes of our conservation work, the rectangular space between the north and east conches is referred to as the *protesis*, while the corresponding and symmetrical space between the east and south conches is known as the *diaconicon*.

and south lobes that could not be accessed during the previous mission owing to the presence of the iconostasis.

In the south lobe, the panels surrounding the niches were completed, together with the granite columns and original plinths and the interiors of the two niches. As a result of the work, a high percentage of the painted surface was recovered and the original aesthetic unity of the conch was restored from top to bottom.

In the east conch, our decision to tackle a large band had a very positive outcome: approximately half the surface area of the first tier was completed, with the exception of the interiors of the niches which will be restored during future campaigns (Fig. 1, east conch, central niche).



Fig. 1

This enabled us to study the technical characteristics, state of preservation and earlier restoration work of an area we had not yet worked in and to evaluate the possibilities of keeping to the same patterns and methods of work as implemented in areas already restored.

We completed approximately half of the west (Fig. 2) and south lunettes in the *prothesis*. In the unfinished section of the west lunette (left side) a test cleaning measuring approximately 30 x 30 cm was carried out on the face of the Virgin.

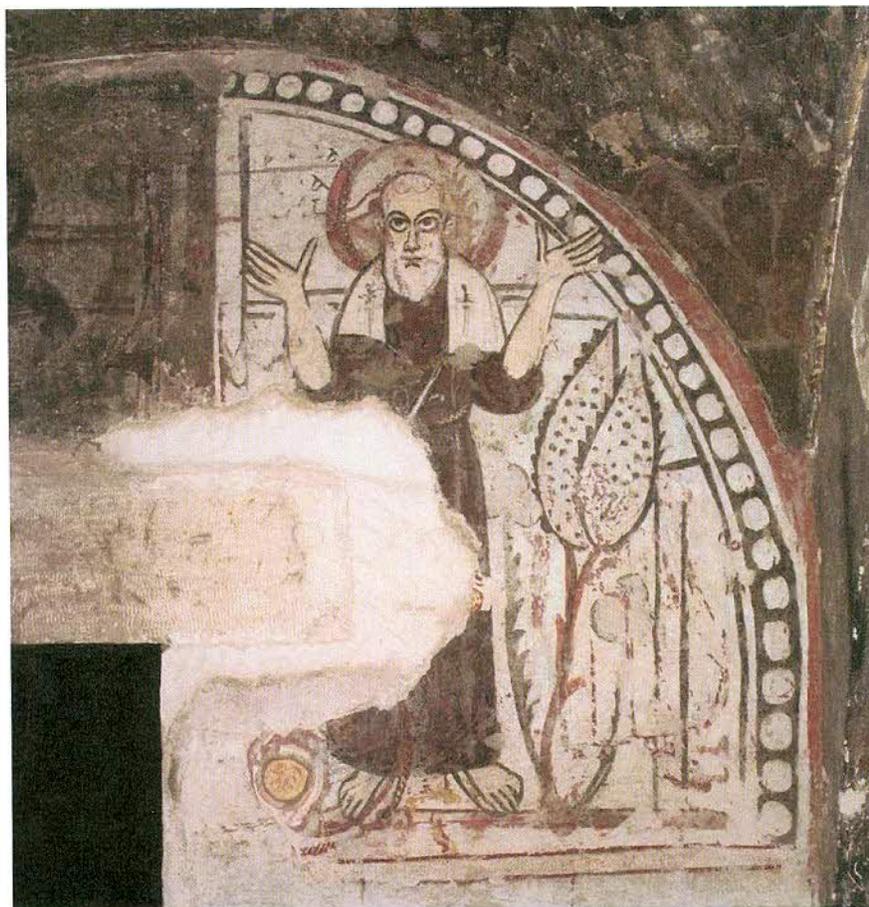


Fig. 2

Work was then completed on half of the north arch. In the north corridor adjacent to the *prothesis* a number of stratigraphic and restoration tests were conducted on the north and west walls while small, specific test cleanings were carried out on the south wall. In the middle of the south wall an extensive test cleaning (measuring approximately 70 x 70 cm) was carried out as an initial assessment of the restoration and aesthetic treatment required in an area to be worked on for the first time during this campaign.

In the south corridor, two limited test cleanings were carried out in the areas where the plaster is oldest (north wall).

The first phase of restoration was to remove old repairs effected using mortar that was not compatible with the original².

We were able to understand and tackle the ancient structural instability affecting the south lobe right down to ground level. We restored the stonework and original and earlier

² The stratigraphy of the repairs is as follows: vegetable fiber with animal glue, gypsum, cement, gypsum. In these areas we worked according to the following criteria: recovery of painted areas covered by old pointing (in the south lobe there were numerous repairs to cracks all over the surface); recovery of mortar used in restoration where this did not impact negatively on the constituent elements; bringing the mortar into line with our restoration work in aesthetic terms; consolidation of fractured or detached stonework and replacement of missing sections of cornices and moldings so that the architectural features can be read clearly; repairing with suitable mortar those gaps where it proved necessary to remove the pointing associated with old repairs.

restoration mortar to a state of equilibrium in order to present a clear reading of the palimpsest of plaster types and paintings. Still in the south lobe we were able to recover vast areas that had been subjected to extensive repair work owing to the presence of large gaps in the plaster. In the east conch we were able to clarify the sequence of repairs carried out by the Comité during the replacement of the woodwork beneath the cornice. All areas of intervention were comprehensively photographed before, during and after restoration work.

WORKING METHODS

Architectural structure

South Lobe, East Lobe, North Corridor, South Corridor

Please refer to the campaign reports of 2003 and 2007 for a description of the building techniques relating to the masonry structure of the triconch³.

A new element should be added to the earlier documentation⁴ at this point. Tests conducted in the north and south corridors have enabled us to see and confirm that the perimeter wall of the monastery has undergone a major phase of rebuilding. We can conjecture that in antiquity, most likely between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the external wall was rebuilt while the central architectural mass of the triconch remained unaltered.

From the time of the 2007 spring campaign, following in-depth visual analysis of the plaster types in the courtyard, we were able to verify the presence of a single application of plaster made up of a lime-based mortar rich in straw. This was applied in two coats, the first containing coarser constituents and the second finer ones. This plaster is also present inside the perimeter walls of the two corridors and the *diaconicon* and *prothesis*. The external wall is built of bricks with a connecting mortar. The bricks are bedded 1 to 1.5 cm apart in a gray mortar containing inclusions of irregular size⁵. In the final analysis, the elements comprising the original masonry of the corridors appear similar in terms of constituent materials to the later external perimeter wall.

³ L. De Cesaris and A. Luzi, Red Monastery - Monastery of St. Bishoi, Technical Report, First Mission, 31 March -19 April 2003. L. De Cesaris, A. Sucato, Red Monastery – Monastery of St. Bishoi, Conservation of the Wall Paintings - Final Report – Seventh Mission, 2 March -2 May, 2007.

⁴ We wish to extend thanks to Dr. N. Warner for the insight relating to the origins of the structure of the external wall of the monastery. Dr. Warner was the first to observe that the big external wall was rebuilt after the original construction of the triconch.

⁵ It is interesting to observe that although the entire perimeter wall of the nave in its present state shows evidence of a single consistent application of plaster which is in fact the same as that associated with the notable large crosses painted in the courtyard, the lunette surmounting the carved limestone entrance to the nave on the other hand bears traces of the usual palimpsest of paintings in the triconch.

In fact, the first paint layer (white wash on the conches) and fragments of plaster from the third phase of decoration have been identified. This leads us to think that, during the great phase of reconstruction of the perimeter wall, the original carved limestone elements of the doorway and arch were retained in situ and incorporated into the new design. As a result, fragments of the original decorated plaster were preserved until now. A similar approach was adopted in the reconstruction of the external wall of the triconch area.

Plaster

South Lobe, East Lobe

Work was carried out on the first tier of both the east and south lobes during the mission. We were faced with a palimpsest of plaster types comprising a first original level applied to even out the surface of the limestone and infill and prepare them for painted decoration. The layer on the columns and the most inaccessible points is up to 3mm thick and distinguished by its fine, well-finished application. This first level is overlaid by the plaster associated with the third phase. In the areas worked in to date, the presence of whitewash associated with the fourth phase has only been identified in the south lobe, more precisely in the south left niche, although small patches remain in the right niche.

We can state with certainty that the plaster types most widely visible in both lobes all share the same characteristics. They are lime-based with inclusions of quartz sand with large round grains⁶. This plaster, which varies from approximately 0.5 to 1 cm in thickness (the thickness diminishes on the moldings and shafts of the columns) can be linked to the plaster we define as the third phase of application⁷ (also known, by reference to the related phase of painting, as *encaustic* decoration plaster) (Fig. 3). The composition and surface treatment of this plaster are slightly different at ground level although it does belong to the same third phase.



Fig. 3

As we have observed on a number of occasions, such a coherent context suggests that this phase coincided with a time of radical transformation of the decorative scheme that affected all the internal surfaces of the building⁸.

⁶ See Artelab s.r.l, study of constituent materials and techniques used to execute the various phases of painting (September 2005).

⁷ L. De Cesaris and A. Luzi, Red Monastery - Monastery of St. Bishoi, Technical Report First Mission, 31 March 2003 - 19 April 2003.

⁸ Initially we were led to believe that we could identify the second phase of painting since a saint's face located below the gazelle on the right was apparently painted beneath a layer of wax from the third phase of painting. Closer observation however led us to connect this fragment of a figure with a later application present at various points in the east lobe.

Protesis

Extensive work was carried out in the west and south lunettes and almost half the surfaces were restored. Even bearing in mind the considerations set out in the mission report for Spring 2007⁹, it seems less certain that the oldest application of plaster belongs to the third phase. Some elements¹⁰ suggest that we are dealing with an application that preceded the third phase¹¹ (Fig. 4).

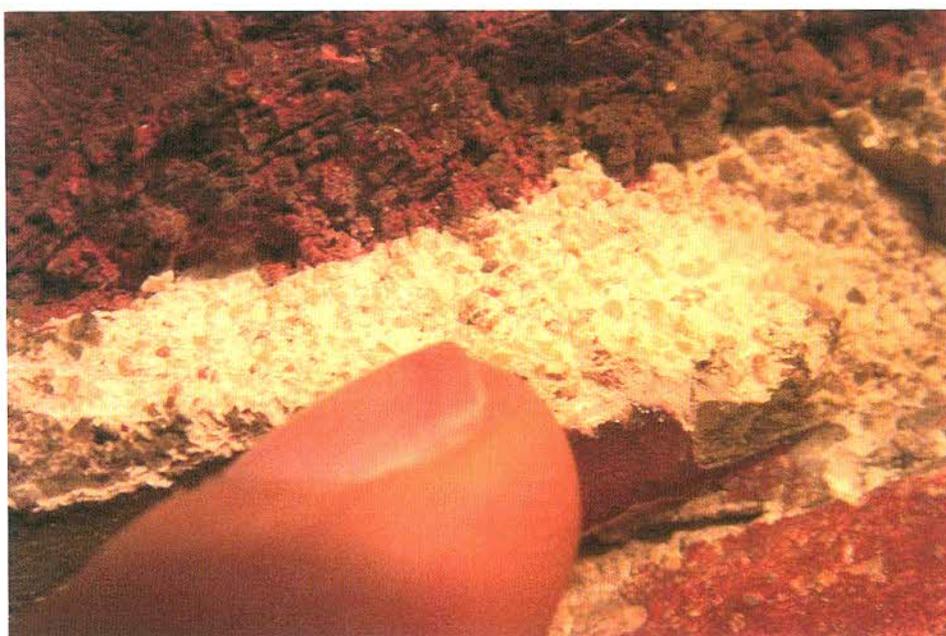


Fig. 4

North Corridor, South Corridor

The plaster types we were able to analyze during cleaning operations showed us that we are dealing with a mortar containing materials typical of the location (lime and local sand). The mortar is white and gives a very smooth surface finish that suggests the additional presence of a percentage of lime powder in the mix¹². We are awaiting the results of comparative

⁹L. De Cesaris, A. Sucato, Red Monastery – Monastery of St. Bishoi, Conservation of the Wall Paintings - Final Report - Seventh Mission, 2 March - 2 May, 2007

¹⁰ The surface smoothing, for example, but above all stylistic aspects such as distinctive specific characters and the characteristics of the painting and pigments used.

¹¹ Were this to be confirmed, we would be led to think that the oldest decoration in the vault (see report for Spring 2007) could be linked with that discovered on the south wall of the north corridor. We would therefore suspect the presence in this area of a first phase of plaster with painted decoration.

¹² The presence of a mineralogist will be indispensable during future campaigns in order to allow more objective recognition of mortar types in situ. This will afford us greater certainty as regards the origins of

analyses of the plaster types in order to draw conclusions regarding chronological identification.

Paint layer

The opportunity to work in the south and east lobes, on the walls of the *protesis* and in the north and south corridors has enabled us to confirm in detail facts relating to the wall paintings already studied in depth during earlier missions. It has been possible to confirm data relating to the methods used to execute the paint layers restored to date, obtain new data and, through cleaning, recover a number of sizeable painted fragments which had been covered with mortar, washes applied during restoration and invasive layers of dirt from various sources.

South Lobe, East Lobe

The restoration work in the south lobe has enabled us to observe and further clarify the decorated backgrounds between the niches and the paintings in the two sections flanking the access door to the façade and the *diaconicon*. The geometric motif of the two decorated panels below the two niches (Figs. 5 & 6) is discernible once again, although a great deal of the plaster is missing. All these decorations belong to the third phase of painting.



Figs.5 & 6

The granite surface of the columns has been recovered as a result of cleaning. Some portions, applied directly to the stone, appear to show traces of a hematite finish. At some as yet undefined point in the past a white finish (white wash) was applied to the column shafts. This whitewash is better conserved at the tops of the columns. On the middle

the plaster types in the two corridors and the *protesis* and *diaconicon*, by relating them to the other applications of plaster present in the church.

column, the restoration work has enabled us to recover a partially preserved Coptic inscription in red¹³ (Fig. 6).

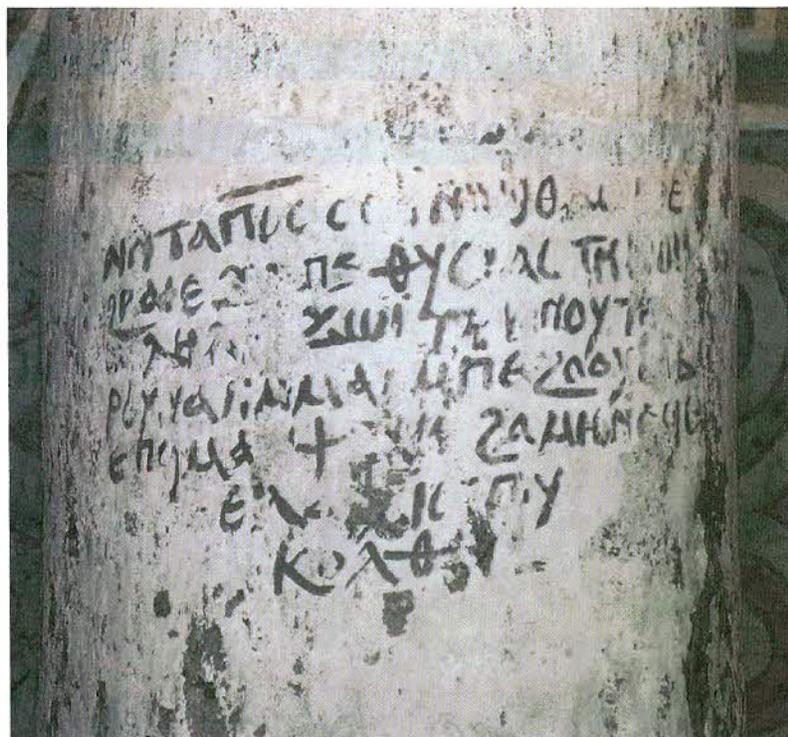


Fig. 6

Also in the south lobe, the restoration of the two niches in the first tier has made it possible to discern the fourth phase of painting and the typical palimpsest encountered in all the painted niches in the church. St. Basil is represented in the left niche whilst the state of preservation of the right niche has made it impossible to identify the saint depicted there (Figs. 7 and 8).

¹³ This inscription seems to be medieval in origin and can be linked with that on the south wall of the north corridor.



Figs.7 and 8

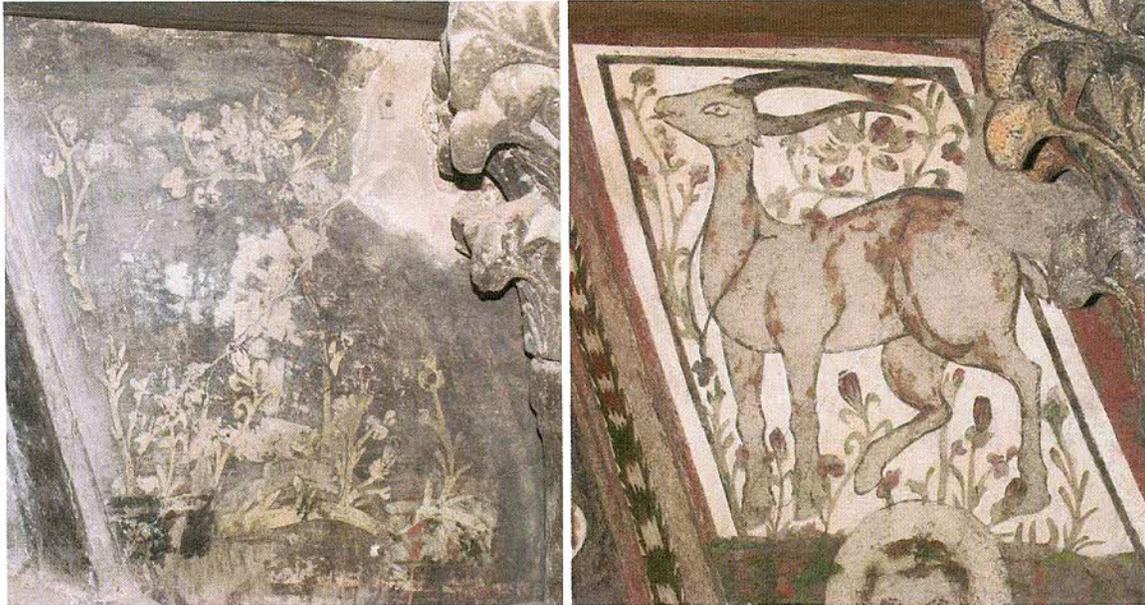
The work of the painter of the *Virgo Lactans* (fourth phase) in the left niche is only partially preserved whilst in the center the typical palimpsest is visible through the gaps in the whitewash. In this case it reveals the underlying third phase application.

The recovery of the black band above bearing the inscription (ABBACILIOC EPISCOPO) has enabled us to identify the saint once again and the iconographical characters can now be deciphered¹⁴. In the right-hand niche, it is almost exclusively the third phase of decoration that is visible. This is also barely decipherable owing to its poor state of preservation. The few fragments of color however allow us to recognize the shape of the saint, represented as a standing figure, backed by a *velarium*, holding up a book with his left arm. Although there are gaps in the *velarium*, its decorative elements are clear, particularly the details executed using the encaustic or wax technique¹⁵. One point of interest is that the cleaning process has revealed fragments of an inscription on the right and left of the saint's head against the white background of the *velarium*. These cannot be deciphered, but presumably bore the name of the saint.

¹⁴ The two niches in the first tier of the opposite lobe (north) present a typical palimpsest. The state of preservation is such that two paintings of the same saint are visible simultaneously, depicted full-length during the third phase and half-length in the fourth. In the two niches of the south lobe that are the object of this campaign a similar transformation of the iconography has taken place between the third and fourth phases.

¹⁵ In the horizontal molding above the saint, restoration work has improved the legibility of a small inscription in ancient Coptic that certainly post-dates the period of painting.

The beautiful decorations on the panels in the first tier of the east lobe have been restored and are once again clearly visible. The paintings were concealed beneath a thick layer of dirt and partially obscured by an old layer of wash without any decorative element¹⁶ (Figs 9 and 10).



Figs. 9 and 10

The restoration of the decorations on the panels between the niches and the engaged columns has enabled us to recover new elements of the decorative repertoire typical of the Coptic figurative tradition during the late antique period. Additionally, in the upper area with the six flat panels below the cornice, animal motifs of particular interest were revealed. On the panels flanking the right and left niches, two pairs of symmetrically opposed peacocks are depicted (Fig. 11).

¹⁶ This wash was applied over the paint layer but particulate matter produced by burning (lampblack) was trapped between the paint layer and the wash.



Fig. 11

The shape of the peacocks is outlined in black and filled in with an application of green (encaustic) color and yellow. Flanking the central niche however, are two gazelles, also symmetrically opposed (Fig. 10) depicted with one back hoof raised and in the act of stripping leaves off flowering bushes. The paintings of all these animals use the white surface of the plaster as a background, across which elegant plants with flowers and leaves extend in the middle distance. The plants are painted in green and pink, using the encaustic or wax technique. Buds and pomegranates are outlined in black (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12

The painting is composed and executed in such a way as to adapt itself to the asymmetrical nature of the panels dictated by the architecture of the building.

We have described the third phase because fragments of white wash from the fourth phase are rare in this area, particularly in the conch.

These fragments include the small figures of two saints (Fig. 13) painted on the engaged columns in the corner high up between the north and east lobes and in a relatively good state of preservation. The style of painting together with the black background framing the haloes of the saints links them unequivocally with two discoveries made during the Autumn 2006 mission at the foot of the external arch of the south apse (Figs. 14 and 15).



Fig.13

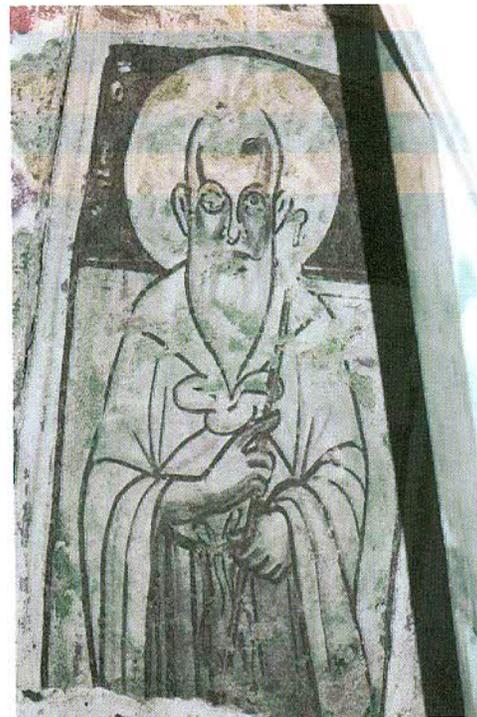


Fig.14



Fig. 15

Still in the south lobe, a figure with a beard painted in a simplified graphic manner (Fig. 16) has been recovered within the geometric decoration to the right of the left niche. Although the state of preservation has only allowed us to recover the face, minus its original coloring, together with some small portions of white wash, we are inclined to attribute this figure to a phase later than the third phase, possibly the fourth.

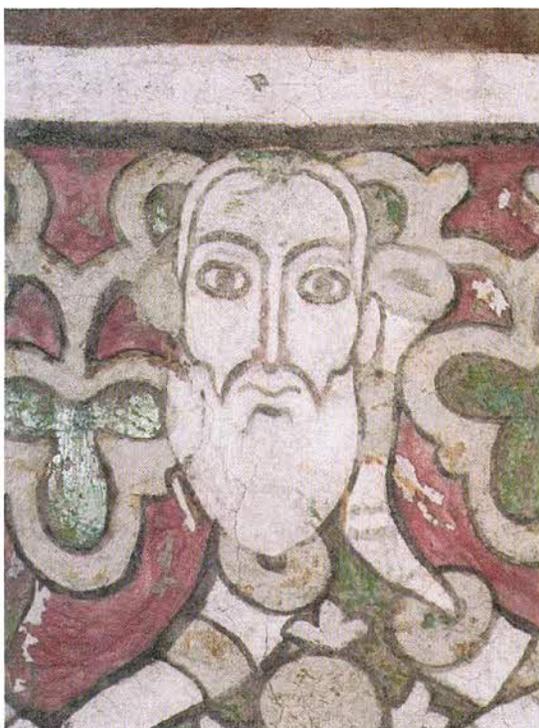


Fig. 16

Protesis

The restoration work carried out in the south and west lunettes resulted in the completion of approximately half the painted surface. In the left half of the west lunette, a test cleaning was carried out on the face of the virgin. The right half of the inner side of the arch giving access to the corridor was also completed, revealing a geometric design comprising a series of concentric circles.

The opportunity of carrying out a more systematic investigation of the decoration in this area and comparing it with the new discoveries made during the test cleanings in the corridor has presented us with a palimpsest of two principal phases of decoration. The most recent one, as described and explained in the Spring 2007 report¹⁷, is contemporary with the fourth phase of painting. The underlying phase is older and can be linked with a previous phase, predating the third phase.

The fourth phase, by the painter of the *Virgo Lactans*, prevails owing to the fine state of preservation evidenced by its iconographic features. On the right side of the west lunette the full-length figure of a praying saint is depicted (Fig. 17). A number of plants, standing out against the background, are painted growing out of the earth. At the top, around the halo, the fragments of several letters are visible. These were probably part of an inscription bearing the name of the saint and are no longer legible.



Fig. 17

¹⁷ L. De Cesaris, A. Sucato, Red Monastery – Monastery of St. Bishoi, Conservation of the Wall Paintings, 2 March – 2 May 2007

On the left side of the lunette, the test cleaning enabled us to discern part of the Virgin's face, seen from the front and in a good state of preservation (Fig. 47).

In the south lunette, a benedictory Christ is depicted between the archangels Michael and Gabriel¹⁸. The messiah is shown standing with a book in his left hand. The fact that he is beardless, with a moustache alone, is of particular interest. The monogram IC is clearly visible on his left. Here, the painter tends towards a markedly stylistic representation: the shadows of the face are reduced to delicate parallel lines and the red of the robes is accentuated by a black line and refined by subtle decorations comprising lines and dots of white (Fig. 18). The preparatory design in the area of the archangel's face is clearly visible owing to the transparency of the white wash. The rapid strokes in red sketched by the painter in order to position the figure within the composition can be clearly seen. During the painting process the artist used these lines only as a rough indication of the position and posture of the figure without bothering to follow them closely (Fig. 19).



Fig. 18

¹⁸ It seems, from the fragments of an inscription between the wings, that the archangel on the left can be identified as Michael.



Fig. 19

North Corridor

As a result of our work in the corridor, we have made a number of observations about the painted palimpsest in relation to the phases of construction of, and successive alterations to, the building.

Stratigraphic tests have been carried out and the restoration of an extensive area in the middle of the south wall has been completed. The palimpsest comprises a single paint layer that was overlaid by an application of wash during the medieval period¹⁹. The whitewash has numerous gaps in it and is detached in many places. No painted decoration of any kind has been encountered on its surface. Only the lower part bears a Coptic inscription in red that was partially involved in our restoration work²⁰ (Fig. 20).

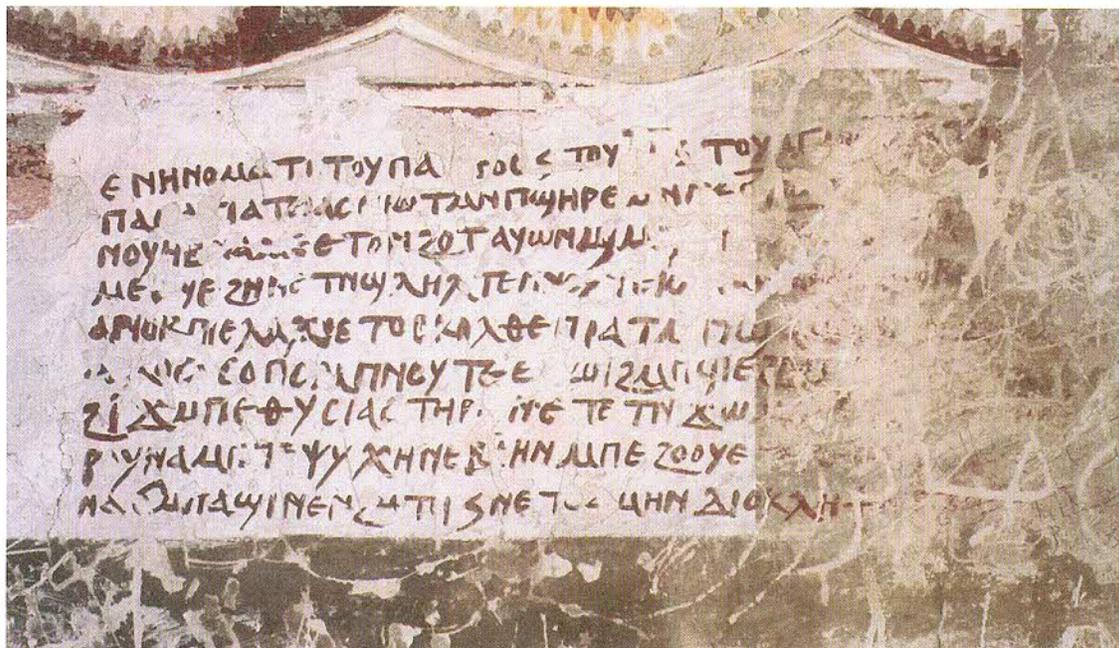


Fig. 20

¹⁹ We now believe that this can be linked to the phase of rebuilding the external perimeter wall of the church during the medieval period.

²⁰ The characters in this inscription suggest to us a link with the whitewashing of the granite columns in the north and south lobes that also bear two inscriptions with similar characters.

Given the particularly poor state of preservation of the whitewash and seeing that it bore no graffiti or incisions, it was decided to recover the decorative elements underlying it. As a result of this decision, we were able to recover an elegant design comprising a motif of intersecting and interwoven concentric circles (measuring approximately 70 cm in diameter) repeated in a horizontal direction and executed with great precision, using a compass (Fig. 21). The design is enclosed between two horizontal red bands. Above the motif, this decorative band is surmounted by a horizontal braid. A braid with similar characteristics is thought to be present beneath the fourth phase composition recovered during restoration of the south lunette and beneath the decoration of the arch of the *prothesis* (Fig. 22).



Fig. 21



Fig. 22

Likewise, part of a decorative composition similar to the interwoven concentric circles described above is still visible at the same height on the west lunette. Below the impost of the barrel vault the composition is crowned by a scalloped band possibly intended to simulate the edge of a curtain.



Fig. 23

Within each scallop there is a plant motif, of which the imprint alone is visible today (Fig. 23). The pattern of concentric circles stops near the entrance to the *prothesis* area leaving space around the arch for unstructured decoration based on an animal theme.

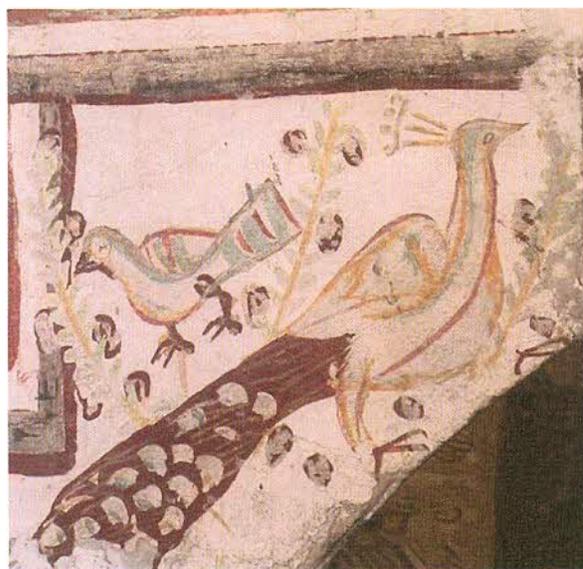


Fig. 24

During this campaign, only the left-hand external portion of the arch was restored. The work revealed images of a peacock and a smaller bird surrounded by simple plant motifs painted on a white background (Fig. 24). Both the peacock, which seems to be walking around the arch, and the smaller bird are painted with simple, incisive naturalism and inventive use is made of the white background. The artist does not use any black lines to delineate the profiles of the figures represented, possibly owing to a personal stylistic preference or given the purely decorative and non-devotional subject matter. This observation is made in view of the fact that a distinctive feature of the Coptic tradition of painting is the use of a heavy black line to trace the outlines of figures. In antiquity (5th and 6th centuries AD) however this ... [*Italian text incomplete at this point – Translator*].

When we analyze the braid motif running below the impost of the arch and compare it with those used to decorate the triconch, a clear link emerges. However, it seems that the braid motif in the corridor could be older. At this point it is vitally important to attribute a precise chronology to this decoration, since, given the direct link with the decoration in the triconch, it would surely have been used by the painter of the third phase as a model for his own work if it had been painted first.

The systematic manner in which the preparatory design and painter's line (Fig. 25) are employed and the use of the compass (Fig. 26) in the circle design suggest that these decorative elements belong to an earlier phase.



Fig. 25



Fig. 26

In the third phase of decoration however, the circle design assumes a more systematic aspect even though the geometric nature of the design becomes freer and the precise repetition of the elements is lost²¹.

A further fact in support of this hypothesis is the total absence of pigments applied using the encaustic or wax technique which characterizes the compositional process of the third phase. Also with regard to the palette, the presence of green, blue (probably ancient Egyptian blue) and purplish brown, all missing from the palette of the third phase of painting at the Red Monastery²², is of great significance.

South Corridor

Two test cleanings carried out in the south corridor enabled us to investigate the single area of plaster that currently seems ascribable to the oldest decorative phase of the building. The test cleanings revealed a decorative scheme that is repeated along the corridor and runs under the impost of the vault. The design consists of a plant motif with trilobate leaves emerging from a circle supported by a pedestal. These elements recall the shape of the Eucharistic chalice. Above runs a horizontal band decorated with repeated circular and oval shapes (Fig. 27). Only two colors appear to have been used: ochre and brown.

At the present time we expect to be able to link this cycle and the decoration of the north corridor.

²¹ The fruits of our experience of working on Coptic wall paintings lead us to believe that in antiquity (4th and 5th centuries AD), geometric decorative elements were executed using a systematic preparatory design that employed a builder's line to divide up the space and a compass to draw circles. At a later stage (6th and 8th [sic] centuries AD) these decorative schemes were executed without a systematic transposition of the design using line and compass. The same decorative elements were used but drawn freehand in architectural spaces that were not always regular in shape.

²² During the Spring 2008 mission we are counting upon chemist/mineralogist Dr. D. Poggi to carry out a more accurate study in situ of pigment and plaster types. Comparative studies between different areas of the monument will be carried out and should enable us to confirm one way or another the hypothesis previously advanced.



Fig. 27

STATE OF PRESERVATION AND PREVIOUS RESTORATION WORK

Masonry Structure

The architectural structure of the south lobe suffered serious structural disruption in antiquity. Considering the area in which we have worked, it is possible to evaluate and precisely catalogue the structural problems and their consequent impact on the surfaces. Naturally, a simple comparison of the current state with the photos documenting the state of the façade at the beginning of the twentieth century (Fig. 28 taken from: C.Meurice, *Redécouvertes et premiers travaux sur les monastères de Sohag*, 2004) shows the scale of the structural problems and the work connected with them.



Fig. 28

The Autumn 2006 and Spring 2007²³ mission reports describe the nature of the damage evident along the entire upper part of the conch. There is an accentuated line of cracks

²³L. De Cesaris, A. Sucato, Red Monastery – Monastery of St. Bishoi, Conservation of the Wall Paintings Final Report, 1 November – 22 December, 2006; L. De Cesaris, A. Sucato, Red Monastery – Monastery of St. Bishoi, Conservation of the Wall Paintings Final Report, 2 March – 2 May 2007

which start in the second tier from the area above the extreme right-hand niche and descend to the first tier where the stone blocks composing the right-hand niche are also fractured. The tympanum is cracked exactly at its apex and there is marked slippage between the two sides (Fig. 29). The crack descends the entire length of the niche resulting in the loss of a considerable section of plaster from the center.

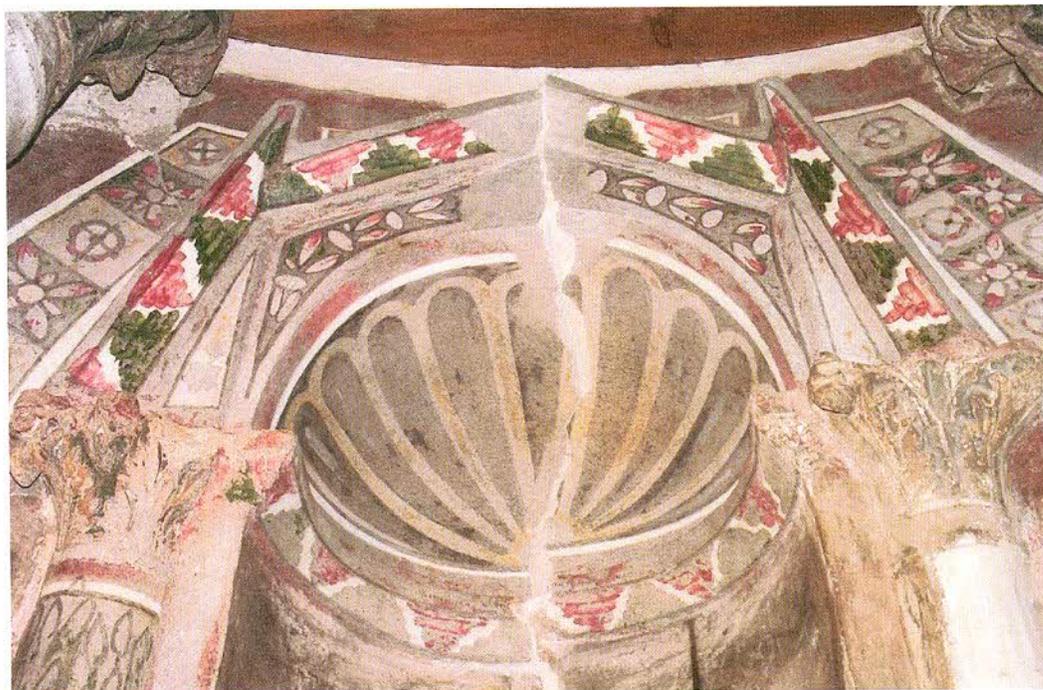


Fig. 29

During the last mission we removed the pointing which encroached heavily upon the area of woodwork between the first and second tiers replaced during the work of the Comité and were therefore able to recover much of the edge of the plaster that formed a background to the niches and lunettes. Following the recovered edge, it is now possible to see how the whole surface of the wall has sunk approximately 7-12 cm to the west. When the pointing below the cornice was removed, it was observed how the pointing filled a larger space on the east side than on the west.

The difference in floor level between the part of the south lobe adjacent to the *diaconicon* (the east side) and the opposite side, facing west, is probably also a consequence of this instability. This is because, when the floor was re-laid in modern times, the architectural structure had become stabilized with the east lobe sunk some 15-20 cm (Fig. 30).



Fig. 30

Above the access door in the *protesis* area there is a large limestone block (measuring approximately 120 x 30 cm), which was replaced by the Comité. The block was clumsily installed, causing the loss of a considerable amount of painted plaster on the right and beneath the clypeus with the Madonna. Clearly, the stone architrave in the passage was so damaged as to require total replacement.

Plaster

Problems affecting the plaster such as lack of adhesion, flaking, cracks and falls can be attributed to both natural and human causes. Although the cracks described above opened in response to earthquakes or as a result of structural instability in the building, much of the plaster was lost owing to human intervention when stonework was removed, replaced or repaired and when all the woodwork was replaced.

In the south lobe the plaster is cracked in the areas of structural instability. The cracks correspond to sizeable gaps between the plaster layers and the wall. Portions of plaster have been lost, as already observed, in the right-hand niche of the first tier and, more markedly, in the flat panels painted to resemble marble inlay beneath both niches.

In the *protesis* and the cornice of the east lobe portions of plaster have been lost as a result of human intervention. As already indicated, there are many gaps in the plaster in the west lunette of the *protesis* where the architrave was replaced (Fig. 32).



Fig. 32

Extensive areas of plaster have fallen away along the edges of the blocks forming the cornice between the first and second tiers of the east lobe. This occurred during the work of the Comité in dismantling and replacing these blocks.

At this time, earlier repairs were redone and gaps filled using unsuitable mortar that encroached heavily on the original painted plaster (Figs. 33 and 34).

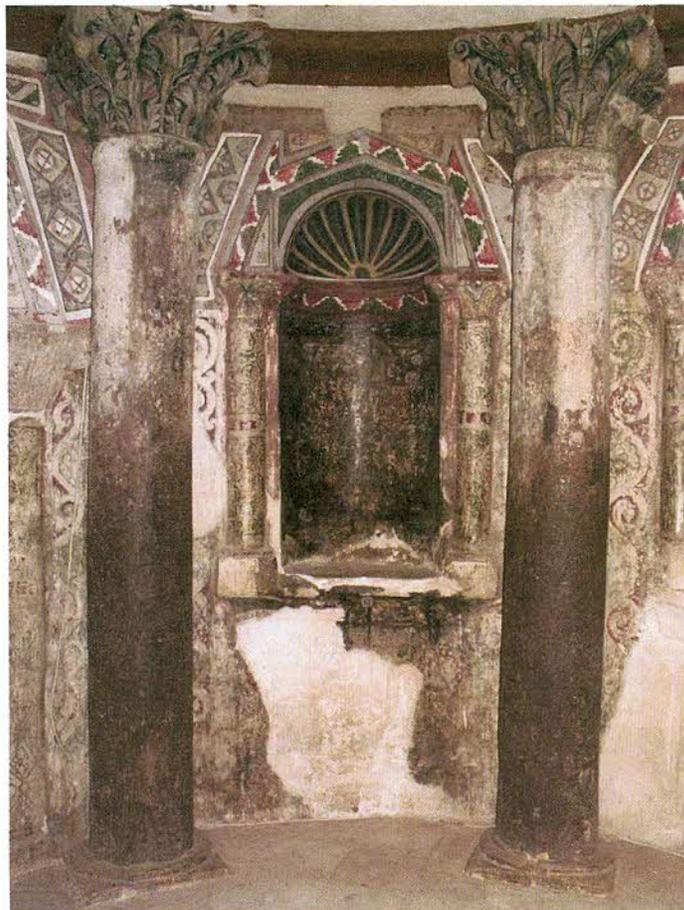


Fig. 33



Fig. 34

Paint layer

The state of preservation of the paint layer varies widely as a result of many factors summarized below:

- The technical and compositional features of the materials used and the stratification of the palimpsest.
- Water entering through cracks, windows and holes in the roof. This has caused saline efflorescence and blackening on the painted surface.
- Atmospheric agents, the scouring effect of wind-borne sand and solar radiation
- Bird droppings and the establishment of colonies of insects on the painted surface, in cavities in the masonry and sockets for woodwork.
- Human intervention: attempts to clean the surface, attempts to remove mortar used in repair work, the desire to read the inscriptions inside the niches, the removal of more recent paint layers in search of older ones and lastly, in the first tier, frequent maintenance work and the placing of oil lamps and candles on the floors of the niches.

As far as regards causes of deterioration associated with working methods, the paintings on white wash by the artist of the *Virgo Lactans* observed during this campaign only in the

prothesis and the niches of the south lobe, are generally well preserved. Paintings tend not to adhere in places where they are executed over an earlier paint layer with a thick covering of dirt and where the earlier paintings were executed using the encaustic or wax technique. In analyzing the causes of deterioration triggered by human intervention, it is interesting to note the similarities and chronologically group a number of operations identified in different areas and carried out during previous restoration work on the paintings. The paintings in the niches in the first tier were subject to restoration work that cannot be dated accurately but was probably carried out after the work of the Comité. These areas were covered with a thick layer of heavily oxidized oil and resin-based varnish²⁴ (Fig. 35).



Fig. 35

In some areas of the decoration in the timpani, although the surface has not been treated with the oil and resin-based varnish, the black outlines of various motifs have been painted in sporadically. In the south lobe, the paint layer has suffered particular damage caused by an earlier attempt at restoration that we believe was carried out after the 1950s. As already described during the work on the south apse and the decoration of the second tier, the surface was subjected to a generalized cleaning that was dramatic and ruinous in its

²⁴ L. De Cesaris and A. Luzi, Red Monastery - Monastery of St. Bishoi, Technical Report, Third Mission, 4 October – 10 November 2003

effects²⁵. It is possible that the almost total loss of the fourth level of painting in the right-hand niche of the first tier was sustained at this time. The drastic nature of the cleaning is probably connected with the desire of the workers at the time to reveal the underlying paintings and with them, the possible presence of inscriptions.

To date, the full-length figure of the saint belonging to the third level of painting is almost impossible to make out (Fig. 36). This is the result of the mechanical cleaning carried out in order to reveal the figure coupled with its exposure and proximity to the faithful during religious services. It was common practice to place candles and oil lamps in the ground floor niches during religious ceremonies. In addition to this, the Coptic community's habit of touching the images of the saints in order to receive their blessing has worsened the state of preservation of the paint layer.



Fig. 36

Fortunately for us however, the white wash was not mechanically removed in the left-hand niche in order to investigate the painted palimpsest. Our restoration work revealed it to be partially preserved beneath a layer of dirt and sooty deposits from candles and oil lamps (Figs. 37 and 38, before and after restoration). The areas in which the white wash has fallen away can be attributed to differing powers of adhesion to different applications of color in the underlying paintings and the mechanical action of the touch of the hands of the faithful. On all the remaining surfaces of the niches the layer of dirt appeared to be a natural deposit composed of atmospheric particulate matter and sooty residues produced by the burning of

²⁵This radical cleaning operation was carried out exclusively in the south lobe of the apse down to ground level.

candles, lamps and incense. Now the Coptic script at the top of the icon is legible again and the saint can be identified (BASILIO).



Figs. 37 and 38

Also in the south lobe the white wash covering the five granite columns has been badly damaged as a result of its proximity to the ground and consequently, to the faithful as they pass. As a result, there are gaps in the Coptic inscription painted in red on the central column. Fortunately, the worst of the damage begins just below this inscription where the white wash has completely disappeared²⁶.

The decoration of the first tier of the east lobe, home of the *santa sanctorum*, was heavily blackened, as can be seen from the state of the lower section down to ground level which we have not restored. The blackening can be explained by the fact that this is the current location of the altar, illuminated by a great number of lighted candles, and where the priest usually stands with the censer. As a result, the whole surface was much more greatly obscured than the other areas of the triconch (Figs. 39 and 40).

²⁶ The inscription here is better preserved than its counterpart, probably written at the same time, on the symmetrically opposed column in the north lobe.



Fig. 39



Fig. 40

Before restoration, the task of deciphering part of the decoration was rendered even harder by the presence of a relatively modern wash, without decoration and with many gaps. However, the pigments applied using the encaustic technique seem to have been preserved better in this area than in others. This demonstrates that, as is often the case, the dirt and sooty particulate matter deposited on the surface have directly or indirectly protected the paint layer. On the other hand, where mechanical action on the walls and the passage of pilgrims associated with the religious activities of the building had a greater impact, the paint layer and decoration have almost entirely disappeared, leaving only the imprint of the design to be seen. This kind of problem has been encountered particularly on the uprights of the two passageways connecting the south lobe to the facade area and the south lobe to the *diaconicon* (Fig. 41).



Fig. 41

In the *protesis* it is worth analyzing the state of preservation of the paint layer in relation to two different levels of painting. As already explained in the section on working methods, thanks to new data collected during this campaign, we are now inclined to consider the first application of painting in the *protesis* as belonging to the first level. We will now go back and summarize the state of preservation of the first and fourth phases applied on white wash. The extensive and generalized loss of the layer of white wash actually renders the underlying decoration visible. It is therefore important to summarize the state of the vault at this point, even though it has not been restored during this mission.

The yellow used to fill in the shapes of the eagles in the first level is well preserved, even though the finishing layer, perhaps of varnish, that presumably existed has completely disappeared today. The blue background between the wings and the racemes has a number of gaps in it, presumably caused by the natural fragility of the pigment (Fig. 42).



Fig. 42

The south and west lunettes (Figs. 33 and 34) appear to have lost less whitewash than the vault. The phenomenon is generalized but less serious than in the vault where the lowest parts of the pendentives have lost the fourth phase almost entirely. The presence of these numerous gaps has enabled us to examine the iconography of the older layer. In the west lunette the shape of a cross with a haloed figure to the right of it can be seen. The outlines are traced in red and there are plants blossoming from the top of the arms of the cross and what may be a crown painted yellow. In the south lunette all that can be seen of the first phase design are a few small portions that do not permit conjecture as to their iconography. The fourth phase whitewash is adhering fairly well except along the margins of the fragments. These problems of adhesion and the gaps themselves can be attributed to two main causes: the first connected with the intrinsic characteristics of the white wash technique and the second a presumed violent mechanical cleaning of the vault, which ‘exfoliated’ the surface. In both lunettes but particularly the south one, a high-percentage vinyl resin was applied to the paint layer during earlier restoration work. It is likely that this happened during the course of restoration work on the south lobe in the last century²⁷.

²⁷ L. De Cesaris, A. Sucato, Red Monastery – Monastery of St. Bishoi, Conservation of the Wall Paintings Final Report, 2 March–2 May 2007



Fig. 43



Fig. 44

In some places, insect nests have been found (Fig. 45).



Fig. 45

The extensive tests carried out in the adjacent corridor brought to light a paint layer affected by generalized abrasion that has not however compromised the reading of the paintings. The technical aspects of the paintings, namely a thin application of paint on well-smoothed plaster, have favored their preservation. The fact that these paintings remained hidden beneath a layer of wash has proved to be their ultimate salvation (Fig. 46).



Fig. 46

On the other hand, the two test cleanings in the south corridor revealed a badly damaged paint layer covered with a thick layer of sooty deposits and particulate matter. The general state of abrasion suggests that even in antiquity, heavy-handed cleaning work was carried out.

RESTORATION WORK CARRIED OUT



Fig. 48

Fig 47

As in previous years, our restoration work has followed procedures in keeping with the methodological guidelines first laid down in 2003. During the subsequent missions between 2004 and 2007 we have continued to refine our working methods in an attempt to solve specific problems

The first task was to remove dust from the surfaces using soft bristle and sable brushes. Where portions of plaster and fragments and stratified pieces of the paint layer (palimpsest)

were in immediate danger of falling, they were secured by means of small strips of Japanese paper stuck to the surface with acrylic resin in a 15% nitro diluent solution (PARALOID B72 methacrylate) and consolidated with injections, into clearly defined areas, of acrylic resin in a 20% aqueous emulsion (ACRYL 33).

This was the case particularly with some fragments of the cornice in the south lobe and some portions of plaster which, being located behind the columns, were adhering less well to the masonry.

In places where the plaster had been repaired or gaps plugged with inappropriate mortar during earlier restoration work, it was removed mechanically using micro-chisels and scalpels. This was true of the cornice in particular. Where the composition of the pointing was compatible with the original plaster, it was brought up to the level, uncovering every hidden fragment of plaster and paint layer in the process. Fiberglass rods had to be inserted in the masonry to repair the largest gaps in the architectural features and moldings (Fig. 49).

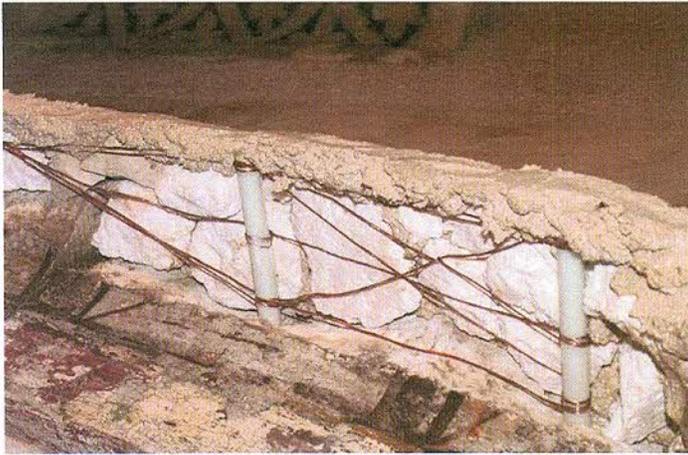


Fig. 49

The rods were needed to provide a supporting framework and lasting anchorage for the mortar and reconstruction work. The mortar was applied in levels, using a mix with medium-sized grains first and finer grains on the surface. This work proved particularly necessary for the projecting molding of the upper part of the cornice (east lobe). As previously stated, hydrated lime, local sand and a small percentage of finely powdered local limestone (1.5 parts lime, 2 parts sand and 1 part powdered limestone) were used in the composition of the mortar (Fig. 50).

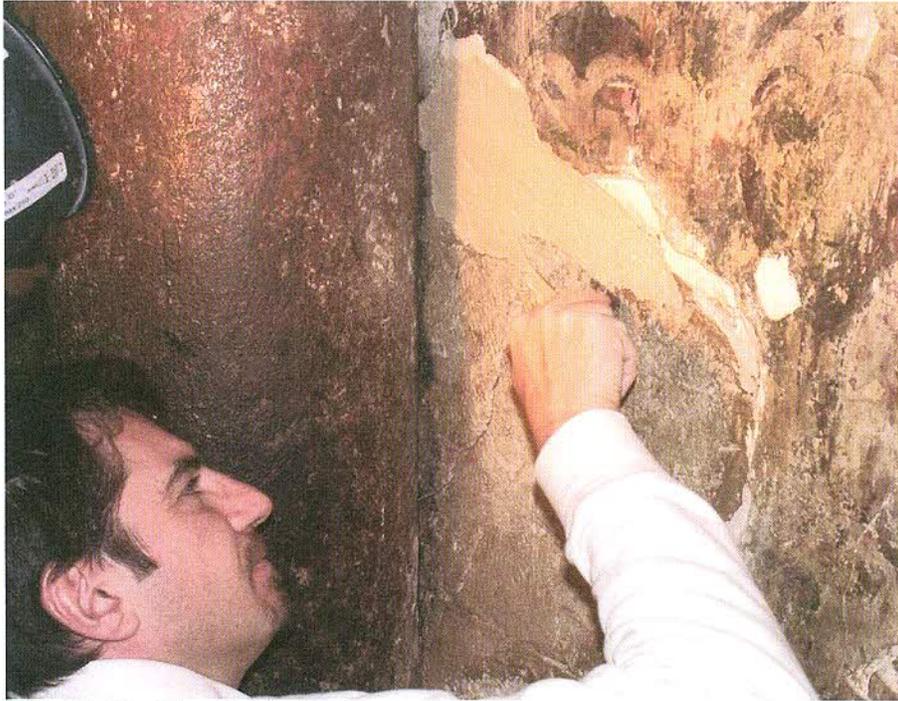


Fig. 50 (D. Pistone at work)

The plaster was consolidated by means of injections of liquid mortar with a similar composition to the original plaster but easily injectable (Fig. 51).



Fig. 51

In emergencies, small pieces of fallen plaster were stuck back in place using a mortar based on acrylic resin in a 35% aqueous emulsion (ACRYL 33) mixed with micronized calcium carbonate powder until the desired consistency was reached.

Raised areas of the paint layer or white wash were stuck down by means of injections of acrylic resin in a 15% aqueous emulsion (ACRYL 33). In some cases slight pressure with a flexible spatula was required, interposing a sheet of polyethylene between the spatula and the painted surface. This method proved particularly necessary in the *protesis*. Here, the working method of the painter of the *Virgo Lactans* (Fig. 52) meant that numerous fragments of white wash required this delicate restoration.



Fig. 52

Where the paint layer was failing to adhere, it was consolidated using acrylic resin in a low 1.5% nitro diluent solution (PARALOID B72 methacrylate) applied using a fine spray and, where possible, a brush.

The methods used to clean the painted surface have been described in detail in previous reports. The system developed has shown itself to be effective and safe with regard to the constituent materials and to reduce mechanical stress on the painted surface. The cleaning system involves, in the first place, the use of organic solvents applied using Japanese paper covered with several single-ply paper tissues to dissolve the substances on the surface (oil- and resin-based varnish). To all intents and purposes, this is a process of stripping. During this campaign, this operation proved particularly necessary in the left-hand niche of the south conch and the south lunette of the *protesis*. The application of Japanese paper and paper tissues impregnated with solvent and the natural evaporation of this substance

actually produces an ‘aspirating’ effect, sucking up the substance and dissolving it without any mechanical action. This stripping process is succeeded by the cleaning work proper.

To sum up, we proceeded as follows: removal of varnish applied to the surface (oil and resin) by means of alternate applications of organic solvents applied on single-ply paper tissues until evaporation (ACETONE, NITRO DILUENT and NITRO DILUENT with the addition of DIMETHYLFORMAMIDE 4:1).

In specific cases, when wax-based substances were encountered, chlorinated solvents (TRIELINE and BALTANE) were used, heated to a temperature of approximately 45° C in a bain-marie. (These solvents were never used in the presence of a paint layer with a wax binding agent [encaustic technique]).

Oily substances applied to the surface and the touching-up work done during earlier attempts at restoration were removed using a slightly basic polar solution with a controlled pH (70 gr/l ammonium carbonate in distilled water). The solution was applied to the surface through several single-ply paper tissues for contact times varying between 3 and 5 minutes (Fig. 53).



Fig. 53 (C. Arrighi at work)

Carbon deposits, oily residues and thin films of saline efflorescence were then removed using a slightly basic polar solution (10 drops of ammonia per liter of distilled water) applied on single-ply paper tissues and working in small areas. The thicker saline efflorescences were removed using scalpels (Fig. 54).



Fig. 54 (C. Di Marco at work)



Fig. 55

In places where only a consolidated deposit of dirt made up of dust, carbon residues and oily substances was present, ammonium carbonate (70g/l in distilled water) was applied using a sponge. This operation had to be repeated several times, particularly in the left niche of the south lobe and on the background panels in the east lobe.

The black lines around figures, decorative elements and inscriptions, traditionally added as a finishing touch to the painting process, were particularly fragile in some instances. After

preliminary cleaning, and as work progressed, some of them had to be fixed with acrylic resin (PARALOID B72 methacrylate in a 15% nitro diluent solution).

The red paint coating the woodwork below the first cornice in the east lobe was cleaned off using a mixture of organic solvents (nitro diluent and acetone). The woodwork was then impregnated with a permethrin-based product (XIREIN) to treat it against attack by insects and protected with acrylic resin in a 3% nitro diluent solution (PARALOID B72).

The gaps in the paint layer were blended in using the technique of toning down with watercolors (WINDSOR & NEWTON). This technique restores legibility to the artistic palimpsest and painted surface and clarifies the reading and order of the different paint layers that can be seen (Fig. 56).

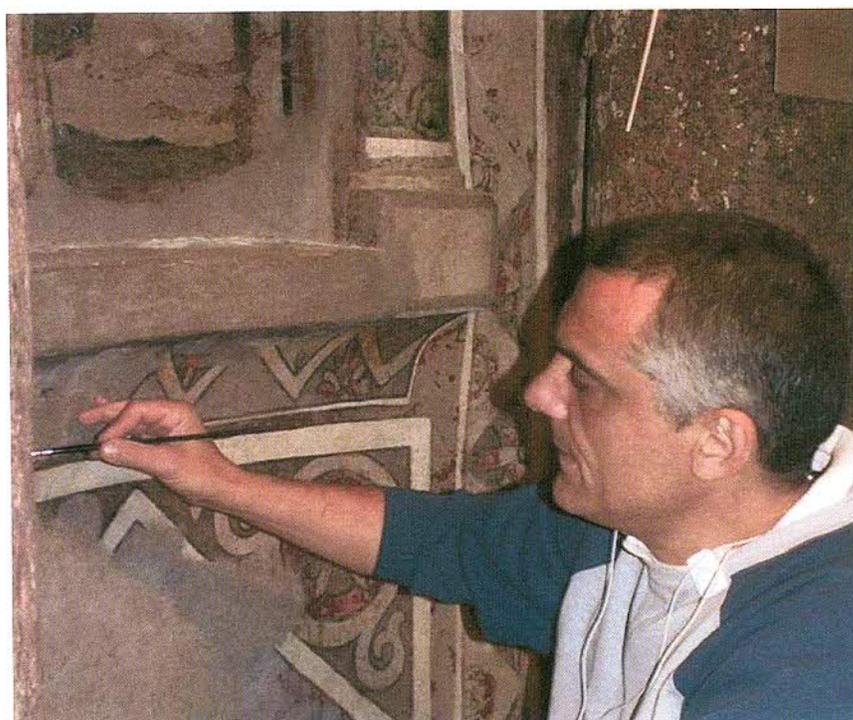


Fig. 56 (L. De Cesaris at work)

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1. Open the computer
2. Write the password: MARWA1234
3. Open Entourage

Kindly print the messages and make 1 copy: date stamp the original for the file and make a copy to the addressed person.

Normal Office work

- letters or memos to USAID, you will find the form under “Mydocuments/ Marwa/ New/ **AID2008.**”
(Scroll down to last page) **(Extra Copy on Desktop)**
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- General letters, you will find it under “Mydocuments/ Marwa/ New/ **General 2008.**” (Scroll down to last page) **[Extra Copy on Desktop (Folder SCA)]**
- For faxes, you will find it under “Mydocuments/ Marwa/New/ **Fax 2008.**” (Scroll down to last page.) Important faxes have to be written under General 2008 file and print it out on the EAC Letterhead. **(Extra Copy on Desktop)**
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(mydocuments/Marwa/new/**consultant register list**).
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- International calls have to be recorded and at the end of each month please forward the sheet to Mariam.
- All letterhead papers are in the first drawer under the printer. In case you need more, you will find the rest on the cupboard in front of Kathleen’s office.
- All empty envelopes are in the third drawer under the printer. In case you need more, you will find the rest on the cupboard in front of Kathleen’s office

Incoming Correspondence:

- Any incoming report , please date stamp, log and make a copy to MJ, JAA, LARA and give the original + CD to Jarek.
- Incoming business correspondence in general should be date stamped, logged in and filed. You file the original and give a copy to the addressed person. Log file is under my desk. Files are in the cabinet on my right hand side.
- You should provide routine informal translation of all Arabic correspondences received and give a copy to Janie and Michael.
- To enter a new book in our technical office library, please date stamp the book and open [mydocuments/Marwa/new/**library list technicaloff books**] and scroll down till the end of the page and write all the information you have about the book. Please forward the book to Jarek (Technical Director).

Outgoing Correspondence

- If any staff member wants to send a courier package, please send it by Fedex. Our account number is 273267646. Fedex telephone number is 22687888. You have to call them 2 hours before collecting the order. Airway Bills are in the hanging wooden trays behind my desk. Please after sending the package, file the AWB in the Fedex file, which is located in the filing cabinet on my right hand side.
- To send a final report to SCA, please make a letter addressed to Mr. Magdi Al Ghandour and give it to Mrs. Amira and attach the following:
 - 5 English Copies
 - 5 Arabic Copies
 - A diskette for both English + Arabic texts + photographs
- SCA extension letters. The procedures are as follows:
 1. Write a letter (mydocuments/Marwa/new/SCA2008) addressed to Mr. Magdi al Ghandour (SCA Zamalek Office).
 2. Prepare the attachments (5 photographs + SCA form + Passport copy for each member)
 3. Put the letter with attachments in an envelope with a copy from the letter on the top of the envelope as a receipt.
 4. Give the envelope + extra copy from letter + attachments w/o photos to Mrs. Amira and keep one in our file with the photos.

- If there is any translation that needs to go to SCA (eg. Final reports), please give it to Mr. Amir.
- You must check every now and then office supplies in the 1st cupboard to make sure everything we use exists. If not, you have to make a PR and write what you and the staff need and then submit the PR after being signed from the Grant Administrator and the Project Director to Mariam and give a copy to Mr. Amir
- A separate PR for computer equipment and also give it to Mariam and a copy to Yasser.
- You should arrange travel (flights and hotels) for EAC staff site visits outside Cairo or Egypt by calling Egypt Panorama Tours (Nelly or Reem for Hotels) and (Roger, Donia or Safaa for Flights) Tel numbers are: 2359-0200, 2359 1301 and 012-742 8951 Fax number is: 2359-1199
- Call maintenance center for the **Canon Photocopier machine** when there is a problem in the photocopier. The telephone number is 33688025.
 - Hussein the driver to get the toner for the photocopier, but please you have to give Mariam a notice and she will proceed.
- Call maintenance center for **Canon Fax machine** c/o engineer Nabil El Badry. Telephone numbers are 344-1223, 304 1371 and fax number is: 3441223.
- You are responsible for receiving EAC checks and staff personal payments and preparing cash receipts for them. The two books are in the first drawer under my desk. After preparing the cash receipts, please submit them to Mariam and make MS sign after receiving them.
- **Staff Time sheets**
- You will receive telephone calls. Please answer the phone by saying: “American Research Center, May I help you.” If the person requested is not at his desk, you should take a note in the telephone message book in my tray and then put it on the person’s tray.
- Michael Jones’ correspondences, you put them on the tray above the shelves on my right hand side.
- Any prepared letters that need to go out, please give them to Mariam and she will proceed.
- Stamps file will be with Mariam (LE 1.50 for Egyptian Stamps) and (44 Cents for U.S. stamps)

Filing Procedure:

* Please file all correspondences you have in their places.

- **SCA file** includes 3 sections: 1 (out letters) – 2 (in Letters) – 3 (receipts)
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- **Letters out file:** no sections – just file the letter on the top of the file.
- **Letters in file:** no sections- just file the letter on the top of the file.
- **Fedex AWB file:** please file all Fedex AWBs after being signed by the messenger in this file.

Subscription of Guardian Weekly

- Please remind Shari Saunders that her subscription of Guardian Weekly has to be renewed on the 31st of July 2008
- Please remind Michael Jones that his subscription of Guardian Weekly has to be renewed on the 15th of August 2008

Please call 27704596 (Mr. Mosa'd) to send a messenger to collect LE390 from Shari and also same amount from Michael to renew their subscription but after taking Michael and Shari's approval to renew.

Important Pending Work:

- As soon as you receive the passport copy from Arnaldo Vescovo by email, please give a copy to Mrs. Amira to send to Magdi al- Ghandour for Luxor Temple project.
- I finalized the SCA submission of the Red Monastery project except for Mark Swanson and Andrew Crislip. Betsy contacted them and I am waiting for their complete forms.
- I finalized the SCA submission of the Tomb of Menna project except for a passport copies of: Pieter Collet, Biancastella Madden, Miriam Mullar, Peter VandenaBeele, Douglas Thorp Hocquet. (Melinda will bring the signed SCA forms so please replace the one I did with the ones she will bring. If she didn't we can send the ones I did)

SCA Security Clearance Status for EAP and EAC Projects

Project	Name of the Project	Project Director	SCA Security Clearance	Status	Comments	SCA Reports
EAP	Bayt al-Razzaz	Alaa El Habashi	Finished	Finished	None	Submitted
	Sabil Farag Ibn Barquq	Hoda Abdel Hamid	Finished	Finished		Not yet (Hoda has to submit the report and we have to give it to Mr. Amir to translate.)
	Old Cairo	Peter Sheehan	Finished	Finished		Sent to be translated and not yet received from Mr. Amir.
EAC	Marina al-Alamein (Cycle One)	Agnieszka Dobrowolska	1/1/2007-31/12/2007			
	Aslam al Salahdar	Christophe Bouleau	1/7/07 – 30/6/08	Ongoing		A summarized report to be sent to SCA for the Year 07 (Dina will send it to us 8/7/08)
	Red Monastery	Betsy Bolman	1/1/08 – 31/12/08	Ongoing	Security Clearances renewal for the Year 09 to be sent by October 1 st .	Sent to SCA
	Tomb of Menna	Melinda Hartwig	1/1/08 – 31/12/08	Ongoing	Security Clearances	Report submitted for April 2007

					renewal for the Year 09 to be sent by October 1 st	
St. Antony	Michael Jones	1/7/07 -- 30/6/08				
Luxor Roman Wall Paintings	Chicago House		Ongoing			Report submitted last campaign for 2006/2007 with Chicago House report. The Italian report has been translated to English and the Arabic has not been received yet from Mr. Amir. After receiving the Arabic from Mr. Amir, we have to give both English, Arabic to Mrs. Amira

Ref:mydocuments/marwa/new/scasecurityclearancestatusforeapeaprojects 8/7/09