

**SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT PLAN
for the
RED MONASTERY, SOHAG**

Nicholas Warner

**Cultural Heritage Tourism Project in Egypt (APS)
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**Awarded to
THE AMERICAN RESEARCH CENTER IN EGYPT (ARCE)
Address: 909 N. Washington Street, Suite 320, Alexandria, VA 22 314, Tel: (703) 721 3479**

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Executive Summary

The first major conservation intervention at the Red Monastery Church in modern history lasted from 1909 to 1912. This was executed by the forerunner of the present Ministry of Antiquities, the 'Committee for the Conservation of Monuments of Arab Art', and focused on structural consolidation of the sanctuary. At the time, although the church was functioning as a site of worship monastic activity at the site had long ceased. This revived in 1999, when the Monastery was re-established with the present abbot, Abuna Antonious, as the leader of the Monastery. The re-use of the historic complex, combined with inappropriate restoration work in the 1990s by local contractors working for the Supreme Council of Antiquities, caused serious physical and aesthetic damage to the church, some of which is irreversible. From 2004-2012, the American Research Center in Egypt with funding from the United States Agency for International Development embarked on a new conservation project at the site in partnership with the Ministry of Antiquities and the Coptic Church, this time focused on the painted decoration of the church's sanctuary and associated spaces. The first test cleanings of the spectacular paintings at the church took place in 2002, and the conservation of all surfaces was finally completed in 2012. Between 2012 and 2014, the project entered a new phase that addressed the critical issue of how to re-use the site for religious and touristic purposes without compromising its integrity. In 2015, the church was re-consecrated for the celebration of the liturgy, and monthly masses have continued there to this day. In 2016, a major scholarly publication related to the project's first phase appeared, ensuring the church's place among the world's most significant buildings.

From 2015-2018, also with funding from USAID through its Cultural Heritage Tourism in Egypt (CHTE) project, further progress was made on the durable development and conservation of the site. The focus here was on the physical conservation of the remainder of the complex (nave and tower), as well as sustainability through training in conservation and heritage awareness raising with stewards from the local community. This report summarizes the conditions at the Monastery in 2018, and should be read in conjunction with the first Site Management Report commissioned by ARCE from Dr. Nicholas Warner in 2011. It also outlines the activities planned for implementation in 2019 owing to a shortfall in funding to complete the CHTE project, partly due to the devaluation of the Egyptian Pound in 2016.

Conservation is a never-ending task, but ARCE hopes that its attempts to establish a permanent local cadre of conservators, custodians, and stewards for the site will bear fruit in the form of a sustainable heritage asset that will benefit pilgrims, tourists, scholars, and heritage managers in the future.

Statement of significance

The sixth-century Red Monastery church of Anba Bishoi and Anba Bigol is a remarkable site due to its unique architecture in the Egyptian context, as well as its state of preservation. Existing in the desert for centuries, but now engulfed by a village west of the modern city of Sohag, this church still stands largely intact. Its dramatic late Roman architecture is enhanced by the most complete program of wall paintings and architectural sculpture surviving from any early church in Egypt. No other early monastic site in Egypt, the Middle East, or Europe exists with surviving material, art historical, architectural and textual remains of such high quality and in such quantity.

When it was built, the Red Monastery church was one constituent of a monastic federation of three local monasteries led by the charismatic Saint Shenoute, abbot of the community at the nearby White Monastery. Due to the survival of his writings, the historical significance of Shenoute and the communities under his leadership is profound. This was emphasized in the 1980s when the Coptic Church re-established monastic practice at the sites of the Red and White Monasteries, which had fallen out of use as monasteries most probably by the 15th century.

The Red and White Monasteries first came to international prominence when they were included on the 2002 World Monuments Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites following their nomination by Dr. Elizabeth Bolman, and Dr. Fawzy Estafanous. Following the inclusion of these sites on the Watch List, organizations in Egypt and around the world have responded with donor support, publication of articles and books, visitation and media coverage. The dramatic results from the consequent USAID-funded conservation project at the Red Monastery church directed by Elizabeth Bolman from 2003-2012 and executed under the management of ARCE, in combination with subsequent publications and international awards, have been successful in focusing positive attention on the historical importance of the Red and White Monasteries.

The most rare and also most fragile treasures at the Red Monastery church are its wall paintings. These cover most surfaces in the original tri-lobed sanctuary of the church as well as a large portion of the west and north walls in the open nave. They fall into two basic categories: figural paintings in the semi-domes and largely non-figural decorations enlivening all surfaces of the walls and the elaborate architectural sculpture. The figural paintings number among the very best of early Coptic art. Art historical work on the project in 2003 showed them to be between three and five hundred years earlier than has previously been thought. The non-figural paintings may be even more precious, as they constitute by far the most complete and best preserved example of the standard classical and late antique tradition of painting architectural sculpture. The figural paintings number among the very best of early Coptic art. Art historical work on the project in 2003 showed them to be between three and five hundred years earlier than had previously been thought. The non-figural paintings may be even more precious, as they constitute by far the most complete and best-preserved example of the standard classical and late antique tradition of painting architectural sculpture.

The significance of cultural heritage cannot be assessed in a vacuum – it is a dynamic concept that changes with time. It requires a careful balance between scholarly study and human interaction. The Red Monastery church not only has historic or aesthetic significance – it has great spiritual importance for the Christian Orthodox community both local and abroad. Historic cultural heritage sites such as the Red Monastery contribute to an understanding of the past and enrich the present, giving value to future generations. An example of this is the evening prayer in the church conducted by Abuna Antonious and other monks attended by ARCE team members along with participants of the Capacity Building/Community Awareness course (of all faiths). This event was described as “an unforgettable moment that captured the expression of the building as an example of living heritage within which aesthetic, historic, architectural, artistic and spiritual values co-exist.”



Figure 1: The sanctuary in its post-conservation condition [Photo: P. Gomez, 2014]

Description of the site

The Monastery is only a 45-minute drive from Sohag airport. The new road linking Sohag to Hurghada has reduced the journey to a three-hour drive from the Red Sea coastal resort and a new fast road now connects Luxor with Sohag. Sohag Governorate is undergoing development in the tourism sector focused on cultural tourism initiatives centered on the ancient sites of Athribis, Akhmim, Abydos and the Sohag Museum, opened in 2018.

The site occupies an area of approximately 3 hectares (7.4 acres) within a boundary that is clearly defined on the north, west, and east by modern masonry walls. Beyond the boundary to the west lies a modern Coptic cemetery and further monastic facilities, including a church and living quarters for monks, as well as a large area of agricultural land reclaimed from the desert. To the east lies the main approach road through a settlement mostly composed of modern reinforced concrete and fired brick structures. Construction to the north is less dense, with remaining pockets of agricultural land, and to the south lies the major part of the adjacent village, Nag al-Deir. The ground level of the site rises slightly from east to west, with a general datum of approximately two meters above the level of the main approach road beside the cultivation to the east.

Four modern gates provide access to the interior of the site, with the main approach on the south-eastern corner being made through a gatehouse with towers (the south gate). A comparable gatehouse lies to the east, which is currently unused, while the north gate is only occasionally used. The bulk of what ‘through traffic’ there is on the site passes through the west gatehouse to the monastic properties beyond. Within the area enclosed by the boundary wall lies the ancient church of the monastery and the surviving archaeological content of the site, as well as a number of modern structures related to contemporary monastic life clustered along the southern edge. These include two new churches, multiple rest-houses, dining facilities, toilets, a souvenir shop and a pharmacy. To the immediate east of the historic church is another four story monastic rest-house built in the 1990s. Outside the eastern boundary of the site is large new building still under construction by the monastery, containing additional public toilets, monastic guest facilities and a kitchen with attached dining hall.

As far as infrastructure is concerned, the monastery has its own dedicated electrical substation located to the west of the main compound. Most electrical connections are made from overhead cabling supported on lamp posts. There is no wastewater provision for the site other than local septic tanks, often installed in a random fashion. Although the Sohag Governorate has plans to install a wastewater collector along the main road serving the village of Nag al-Deir, and although some progress has been made on implementation, it will be some time before local connections are made to this.



Figure 2: View of the Red Monastery church and tower from southeast in 2015 with monastic rest-house behind (image generated by 3D Laser Scan by P. Gasparri)



Figure 3: Site plan of the Red Monastery church (1) and tower (2) in 2018 with archaeological area (3), car parking (4), new churches (5), monastic resthouses (6) and cemetery (7) behind

Site ownership

Ownership of the site is split between the Ministry of Antiquities (MoA) and the Coptic Church. Detailed maps showing the relative boundaries were not available for inspection, but the situation can be summarized as follows. In accordance with the laws respecting Antiquities in Egypt, the MoA Coptic and Islamic sector is responsible for the fabric of the church itself, and has control of much of the land to the north of the church by virtue of the archaeological remains found there. The land to the south of the church is in the possession of the monastery.

Physical interventions in and around the perimeter of the ancient church can only be conducted by foreign missions after they obtain approval from the Permanent Committee. Thereafter, daily supervision by MoA inspectors and conservators is accompanied by inspection and acceptance of approved work. The MoA has no permanent presence on the site, with monitoring activities carried out by staff from a local inspectorate located at the White Monastery.

Management structure and responsibilities

ARCE has held the MoA concession for conservation work at the Red Monastery from 2003 to the present, contingent upon annual approval of planned interventions by the MoA Permanent Committee. Between 2003 and 2012, through sub-grants by ARCE under successive USAID-funded Egyptian Antiquities grants, Dr. Elizabeth Bolman directed the Red Monastery project. During this time a team of Italian restorers, led by Luigi De Cesaris, carried out the conservation of the paintings and sculpture in the tri-conch sanctuary. From 2015 to 2018 Alberto Sucato and Emiliano Ricchi led the same team in conserving the wall paintings in the open nave of the church. Dr. Nicholas Warner, Heritage Architect, has executed the architectural documentation and conservation work at the site since 2006. ARCE management maintained overall responsibility for the planning, implementation by sub-grantees, and achievement of objectives.

Future interventions in the historic fabric of the church, following ARCE's planned withdrawal from the project in 2019, will likely revert to established patterns of procurement. These will either involve a local contractor being tasked with a particular repair, or the monastery itself will carry out the work without necessarily seeking the permission of the MoA. Within the wider boundary of the monastery, the ongoing development projects of the monastery have caused understandable friction between the Church and the MoA, but these differences seem to have been resolved of late. This is not necessarily to the advantage of the wider site, and the recent rapid increase in the scale of new construction by the monastery in adjacency to the historic site has undoubtedly compromised the visual integrity of the church and challenged notions of authenticity.

Present and projected uses

ARCE's sustainable management plan, developed under the Cultural Heritage Tourism in Egypt (CHTE) award, directly supports two goals: the facilitation of tourism at the Red Monastery Church and the continued use of the church for religious services. Both goals are to be achieved while respecting the authenticity of the site and monitoring potential negative impacts such as modern development in adjacency to the church.

A) Tourism

The majority of visitors comprise members of the Coptic community who attend church services (about 500 every weekend and up to 15,000 on major religious feasts), but there are also a growing number of foreign and Egyptian secular visitors to the site. A survey of visitors was conducted at the Red Monastery in December 2015. Out of the 84 questionnaires administered, 60 visitors responded when asked if they wanted to share comments or suggestions. A majority expressed the following comments in order of importance:

- 1) The church (including the tri-conch) should be open to visitors. Most visitors could not go inside the tri-conch and view the paintings because the doors were locked.
- 2) A visitors center or facility should be established to provide rest, refreshments, and toilets, as well as gifts.
- 3) Someone knowledgeable should be available to receive visitors and guide them around the church.
- 4) Information panels should explain the history of the church.
- 5) First-time visitors had difficulty locating the monastery, due to lack of signage and poor road conditions.

- 6) Visitors noted the lack of attractive landscaping, particularly trees, grass and shrubbery, stressing that gardens are an essential part of monastic surroundings. They also noted the presence of garbage around the church, and expressed the view that caretakers should clean the site and provide refuse bins.

These comments must be placed in perspective given subsequent interventions at the site concluding in 2018. Access to the church was indeed restricted at the time of the survey. Since then, the contact telephone number for the monk in charge of the historic church, Abuna Shenoute, has been posted on the door to the sanctuary. Although this does not in itself guarantee entry, it indicates a willingness on the part of the Monastery authorities to allow restricted access. The monks are also aware of the dangers of allowing unrestricted access to the church as heritage awareness does not extend to all potential visitors to the site. In the past it has been common for unsupervised pilgrims, for example, to scratch their names into wall surfaces. This obviously has a relation to point 3, above, and it with this in mind that ARCE has conducted heritage awareness training at the monastery (see below).

Many services are offered to visitors including all those mentioned in point 2, but they are not all found in a single location, and all are outside the perimeter of the historic church, which is beneficial to its long-term survival. Training of potential local volunteer guides and monks in heritage values has also taken place, though monitoring of the direct results of this activity is still undeveloped. Bilingual information panels have also been installed in key locations around the church. Road access to the monastery remains problematic: although the Sohag Governorate has been in the process of upgrading road infrastructure for the last two years, the condition of the road leading to the monastery remained extremely poor in 2018.

Point 6 presents an interesting case of divergence between historic reality and present day perception. The presence of gardens would be detrimental to the future survival of the historic church, and most monasteries were never intended to be pilgrimage sites with a full range of services catering to the desires of pilgrims when they were established. As far as garbage is concerned, visitors take little personal responsibility in disposing of their own garbage responsibly, and by the end of 2018 a considerable number of garbage bins were in use inside and outside the historic church, with daily cleaning carried out by two custodial staff attached to the church.

B) Religious services

In 2015, the historic church resumed its normal functions for religious services on an intermittent and controlled basis. Stewardship is carried out according to the traditions of the Coptic Church, inasmuch as they can be in keeping with internationally accepted standards for the management and protection of art historical and archaeological resources. The creation of a second door in the modern sanctuary screen wall in 2018 serves not only to facilitate emergency evacuation of the building and a clear visitor flow but also allows for the use of the entire church for services, recreating the tripartite division of the Haikal / Iconostasis screen necessary for the church to function liturgically in a correct manner.

In 2019, a temporary Christmas Nativity Scene was set up in the nave of the church. The nave of the church is also used by individual monks for delivering small group homilies to pilgrims in accordance with current monastic practice.



Figure 4: Father Antonius conducting a mass in the restored triconch [Photo. M. Kacinik, 2015]

Management Objectives

Although ARCE's conservation and training projects have had positive impacts on the overall protection of cultural heritage in Egypt, many sites still lack management and maintenance systems. In order to ensure that the efforts and investments are not lost, it is important to develop medium and long-term protection plans for Egypt's cultural heritage. Success depends on partnership with governmental and non-governmental agencies and local communities.

The MoA, the Coptic Church, and ARCE all believe that the conserved historic complex at the Red Monastery, comprising the sanctuary and nave of the church, the tower to its south, and the archaeological area to the northwest should be treated as a whole when considering the sustainable management of the site. To guarantee the sustainability of USAID's commitment to the preservation of the Red Monastery Church, ARCE's objective has been to train both MoA personnel and the Monastic community in the conservation and maintenance of the site, as well as protection from wear and tear resulting from mass visitation. This training included conservation, site presentation and visitor access, and a community heritage awareness program. Each is aimed at safeguarding the site by respecting the multiple significances the church has for different groups, as a combination of living religious heritage in use and a very important historic monument. The monitoring of the success or failure of the training, and in particular the heritage awareness program, is something that ARCE intends to devolve to local stakeholders.

In order to complete the documentation of the church in its post-conservation condition, a complete 3D laser scan of the nave and tower will be executed in order to provide a new base-line for future monitoring of the condition of the church.

Risk assessment

As described in the site management report commissioned by ARCE in 2011 from Dr. Nicholas Warner, the structure of the ancient church needs to be protected from surface water, termites, bird droppings, sun and dust, fire hazard resulting from poor electrical fittings, and damage resulting from large numbers of visitors. These risks have all been addressed in the CHTE project carried out from 2015-18. It should be noted that a study by a hydrologist in April 2016 showed that groundwater does not appear to be affecting the historic buildings. Rather, the water issues are likely caused by surface water (spraying), leaking toilets and water supply pipes and connections.

Of particular concern is the monastic resthouse built only six metres away from the east wall of the church (seen in the background of Figure 2). This contains numerous sanitary installations and is clearly responsible for the concentration of termite activity in and around the sanctuary. The building, which is also taller than the historic church should be demolished, but it remains extremely difficult to persuade the monastic authorities to embark on such a course of action. The surrounding urban growth and agricultural projects to the west of the church may partly contribute to a marginal increase in the water table, but not to the extent of endangering the building at present.

The risks that still remain pertinent, however, are the protection of wall paintings from environmental factors in the nave, and the reduction in potential anthropogenic damage generally. The answer to the former is the construction of a permanent shelter along the north and west walls of the nave, and the latter can only now be addressed through awareness raising as all physical protection measures are already in place. A preparatory sunshade study, commissioned by ARCE independently of the CHTE and based on the existing computer model of the scanned church made in 2015, has indicated the optimal position for this shelter and the results will be presented to the MoA in the near future.

Conservation

Conservation activities at the site fall into three categories: fine conservation of the wall paintings and plaster surfaces, architectural conservation, and preventive site management interventions.

1. Fine conservation. This has included the documentation, stabilization, cleaning and restoration of the plaster surfaces, wall paintings and architectural sculpture in the sanctuary and nave of the church. The same methods and materials have been consistently used in the cleaning of the paint layers, beginning with the December 2002 test cleanings and continuing during the subsequent periods of work until 2018.
2. Architectural Conservation. The historic church and adjacent tower are structures that were seriously damaged in recent history (post 1986) by inappropriate restoration using concrete and cement, as well as inappropriate re-use involving water installations. The principle architectural conservation measures implemented during the period of this award include, by area:
 - Sanctuary: Termite deterrent works and replacement of termite-damaged timbers. An environmentally approved chemical deterrent was applied inside the sanctuary below the stone pavement and to selected wooden elements in the walls. The replacement of a significant number of wooden elements due to termite damage took place: where there was no risk posed to the structure, destroyed elements were removed entirely and the voids carefully cleaned out. All new wooden elements were locally treated with insecticide, trying to maximize internal coverage of the individual elements.
 - Nave: installation of a new limestone floor, anastylosis of column shafts, display of sculptural fragments

- Perimeter walls: consolidation and repair of masonry on exterior and interior faces of north, south, east and west walls including re-instatement of cornice blocks at high level. The work also included the blocking of all holes and crevices in order to prevent pigeons from roosting and fouling the building, a measure that has proved extremely successful.
- Tower: structural repair, internal re-plastering with lime plaster, protection of domes and vault on roof, re-construction of upper stair to roof



Figure 5: The nave looking west after anastylosis of columns and conservation of wall-paintings

[Photo: M. Coen, 2018]

3. Site management. Tasks included the installation of metal railings to protect paintings at the west end of the nave, and the installation of a barrier along the south side of the nave to prevent accidents occurring due to changes in levels. Visitor information panels were also installed in key locations, as well as prohibitional signs discouraging visitors from damaging the paintings. Visitor access to the sanctuary of the church was improved by the provision of an additional door in the modern west wall to allow for a separate entrance and exit to the sanctuary. This is an important safety feature, which had been rejected by the MoA from 2011 to 2017 but was then approved. To deal with solid waste generated by visitors, the church management has installed waste receptacles inside and around the church. Caretakers dispose of the garbage daily and also sweep the floors inside and outside the sanctuary on a regular basis, as well as the paved areas outside the perimeter wall.

In parallel to the CHTE conservation activities, a number of other important site management tasks were executed with funding from the Antiquities Endowment Fund (AEF) of the ARCE. These included protection of the perimeter of the church with a subsurface system of pipes for the introduction of chemical termite deterrent. The system is designed to be sustainable, with repeat applications of deterrent to be made through the same network as and when required. The creation of a pedestrian-only zone around the historic church with disabled access to all areas safeguards the complex from the unnecessary watering of the ground by the monastic authorities and the parking of vehicles in proximity to the walls. The provision of a WC on the roof of the Tower for the use of Father Antonious, and all necessary plumbing on the exterior to the building leading to a remote septic tank, safeguards against the inappropriate and potentially damaging installation of an alternative system by the monastery.



Figure 6: Completed hard landscaping on the south side of the church and tower [Photo: N. Warner, 2018]

At present, there are still a number of remaining conservation and visitor management objectives to be realized at the site, and ARCE will continue to provide the lead in these efforts. They include the completion of the conservation of the north and south limestone portals of the church; the completion of conservation of one area of remaining plaster on the west wall of the church; documentation of the 2015-18 conservation interventions through 3D laser scanning; the construction of a shelter to protect the paintings on the north and west walls of the nave, the provision of further visitor information in a variety of media, focused on the tower; the protection of the archaeological area to the northwest of the church.

Conservation Training

Between 2015 and 2018, twenty-seven MoA conservators from Sohag, Minia and Aswan attended practical onsite training with the Italian conservation team during four seasons of conservation. Their experience enabled them to attain direct knowledge of the site and history of the paintings, and prepared them to continue to maintain them in the future. Trainees will be employed in future conservation work at the Church planned for November-December 2019, which will reinforce the value of their participation in the program thus far.



Figure 7: Alberto Sucato with local trainee conservators, 2017 [Photo: M. Jones]

Heritage Awareness Training

The goal of ARCE's outreach training program for local community members, the monks of the monastery, the employees of the Ministry of Antiquities, and tour guides and other interest groups is to ensure the long-term protection of the Red Monastery, by informing the local community about the history and significance of the site from a wider, more global perspective, thus encouraging them to take pride in their heritage and the responsibility of regularly maintaining it and promoting its visitation and preservation.

The focus of the initial Heritage Awareness training course for nine community volunteer women was to raise the awareness of the participants on the values of heritage in general and the Red and White Monasteries in particular. Participants were given an intensive training on the history, art, architecture conservation of the Red Monastery's historic church so that they could be of assistance to the Monastery in explaining the site to the visitors. Training topics included the concept of heritage architecture in the context of the Venice Charter, as well as other topics such as the creation of UNESCO, the Nubia campaign and the World Heritage Convention. A detailed presentation on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of World Heritage was discussed and explained. World Heritage

Sites in Egypt were introduced and brief information on each site was presented. Members of the Italian conservation team gave presentations on the painting conservation work and participants observed the work being carried out. The aim was to enable them to provide visitors with information on the significance of the church, its aesthetic value, and efforts to preserve it for the community and world heritage. Abuna Antonious, the head monk of the Red Monastery, attended some parts of the course with the participants and this allowed for interesting discussions and debates that usually do not take place during the regular meetings. Another course was also tailored for monks from the Red and White Monasteries as well as men who work at the monastery.

Many of the women volunteers bring school children (especially from Sunday school) on visits to the Red Monastery. Following the outreach training they were better able to explain the church to the visitors. They are also ready to assist the monastery during the holiday seasons when the number of local visitors is very high. The training motivated many of them to continue working in heritage conservation. For example, one of the trainees took a course organized by the Ministry of Antiquities to a group of volunteers in the Sohag museum. Others are seeking degrees in heritage. The work with this group of women demonstrated that they are eager to learn and are willing to assist the monastery and ARCE. One of the issues noted is that most of them do not speak English well.



Figure 8: Heritage awareness seminar with Father Antonious and Dina Bakhum (Photo: M. Kacicnik)

Recommendations on conservation

Conservation and visitor management: the planned program of activities, scheduled for implementation in November-December 2019 and already approved by the MoA Permanent Committee, will bring to an end all planned interventions inside the historic church with the exception of the construction of the shelter for the painting on the walls of the nave. The MoA should accept the proposed design of the shelter, as the least obtrusive and most effective method of long-term protection, to avoid the permanent loss of the wall paintings in the nave through exposure to the sun.

It is recommended that no future connections to a water supply be made in the church or tower. The monastery and the MoA have accepted that the most appropriate uses for this historic structure are for religious services and touristic visitation. Existing wastewater routes must be consolidated and directed towards the planned mains sewage pipe when it eventually arrives in the vicinity. This is especially important in view of the large new developments the monastery is undertaking on the site and the anticipated increase in the overall volume of water and wastewater in the area.

Daily watering of the ground around the church with a tractor must be permanently discouraged. The introduction of hard landscaping around the perimeter of the church in 2018 has distanced this activity from the historic buildings, but any water soaking into the ground adds to the risk of continued termite infestation. Regular inspection of the church should be made to determine whether termite infestation has returned. Certain individuals who observed the termite control procedures are aware of the method for inspection and treatment, and are ideally suited to be responsible for this task. ARCE is willing to share reports and protocols for treatment if requested. It has been suggested to the Monastery that carpets should not be used in the sanctuary as they are an attractive source of nutrition for termites, but this advice has gone unheeded

Heritage awareness training: follow up activities with the community women volunteers (either by the Monastery or ARCE) are recommended. English courses are recommended for community outreach volunteers to enable them to receive foreign visitors at the Monastery.



Figure 9: Computer model of the nave showing proposed location of protective shelter and extent of shade on 25 March 2019 (image: P. Gasparri. 2019)

Interpretive plan (elements and goals of interpretive program)

The primary focus on the Red Monastery as a heritage site is directed at the ancient church and its remarkable wall paintings and architecture. With conservation essentially completed, the site promises to become more of a tourist destination, and will arguably be the most important ancient church in Egypt. A program must be in place aimed at protecting the site from damage by an increasing number of visitors, together with the implementation of an interpretive program.

There are at least three different kinds of audience that must be considered when providing any interpretative information on site. The type of information provided to each of these audiences is expected to vary in both form and content. They are:

Pilgrims: This is by far the largest group of visitors to the site. At peak times, between 50 and 100 individuals might be present in the church, including large family groups. Most members of this category of visitor will only speak Arabic.

Domestic and foreign tourists: At present this is limited to individuals and smaller groups of between 15 and 20 people. The frequency of visits is likely to increase as knowledge of the church's extraordinary quality is disseminated. English will be the language of communication for the majority of these visitors.

Members of the scholarly and conservation community: This is a specialist audience of small groups or individuals.

Patterns of Visitation and Access: There is a high concentration of visitors to the site on Fridays and Sundays when members of the local community attend religious services in the modern churches constructed to the west of the historic church. Pilgrims also visit the site from as far afield as Alexandria, often staying overnight in accommodation provided by the Monastery. Such visits can

occur on any day of the week. The monks who liaise with these pilgrims often give them tours of the historic church. Unlike regular tourists, both pilgrims and members of the local community frequently visit the church in the evening. The month of July also sees a higher number of visitors owing to the celebration of the saint's day of Saint Shenoute at the nearby White Monastery. The Heritage Management consultant, Dina Bakhoum worked with the monks and lay volunteers to establish protocols for receiving and providing information to domestic or foreign tourist visitation of the church sanctuary in conjunction with the Monastery.

The promotion of visitation to Sohag in general and to the Red Monastery in particular requires strong collaboration between different interest groups. The Red and White Monasteries as well as a number of other heritage sites in and around Sohag allow for interesting two or three-day trips. In addition the Ministry of Antiquities have opened the Sohag Museum. The existence of Sohag airport facilitates travel to and from Sohag; and other travel options also exist. The main difficulty for foreign tourists might be the convoy between the sites in Upper Egypt, but experience demonstrates that this should not be a problem if the visit is planned and organized with the security in advance. There is, however, a need for more facilities (restaurants and hotels) for foreign and domestic tourists other than pilgrims who routinely stay at the monasteries.

Visitor information: The provision of visitor information using different media is considered to be an essential means for communicating the history of the site, including its conservation through the recent project interventions, to the widest possible audience. This is necessary to help ensure that the considerable investment of time and money in the project has a maximum impact, creating a more sustainable future for the site through knowledge transfer and outreach.

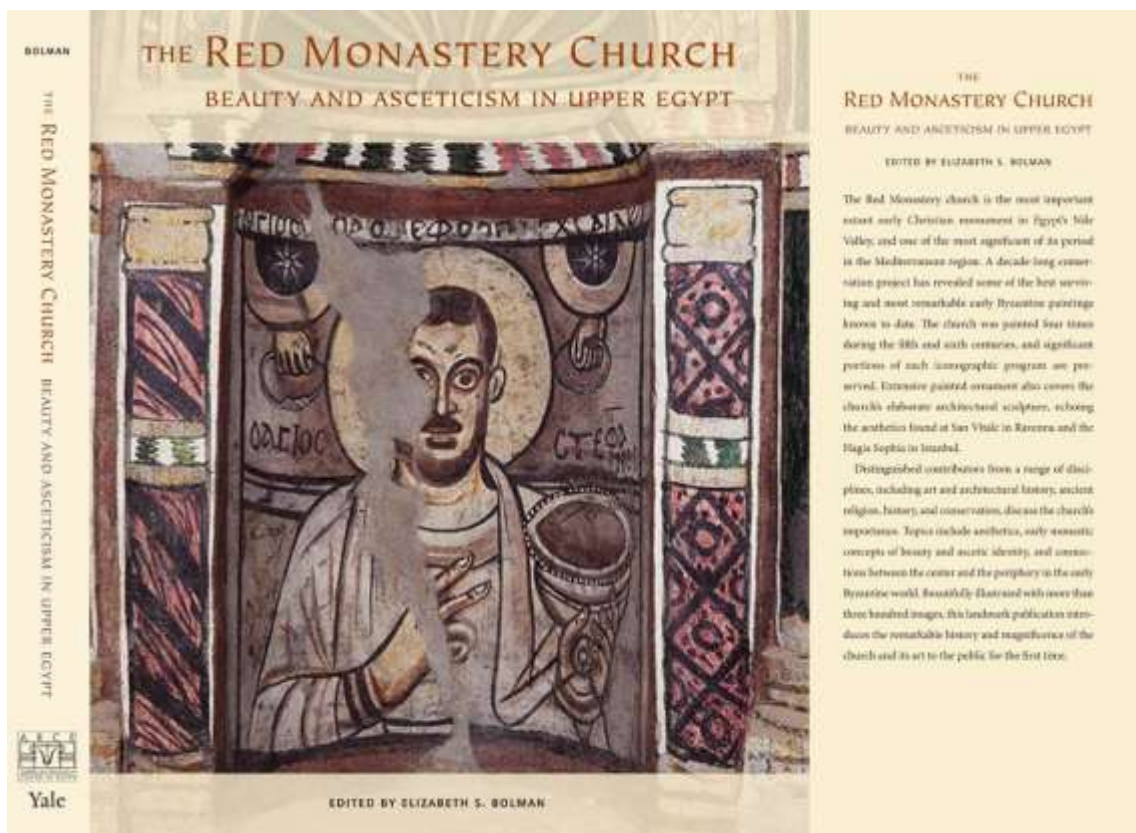


Figure 10: Cover of the print publication of the project's activities and discoveries, 2016.

To date, the following relevant material has been generated for the project:

- Print publication: E.S. Bolman (ed), *The Red Monastery Church: Beauty and Asceticism in Upper Egypt*, Yale University Press 2016: 350pp. This is a major scholarly publication.
- Photo-panorama of the interior of the church: <http://www.360cities.net/image/red-monastery-sohag-egypt#2.10,-83.70,90.0>
- A 5-minute film about the artistic value of the church (in English, 2012) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VT7TDxZ9NpY>
- A 10-minute film generated by laser scanning of the church carried out in 2015 (not available to public at present)
- The Monastery printed in 2015 its own short bilingual commentary on the historic church within the context of a larger guidebook relating to the whole monastery.
- Six information panels installed in the church:
 - Dedication panel for donors and partners in the project
 - General information panel on the history of the church and the project
 - The Tower of St. Helena
 - The Nave
 - The Sanctuary
 - The Paintings in the Sanctuary



Figure 11: One of the Visitor Information panels in the church (Photo: N. Warner, 2018)

Web presence and Quick Response code: A developed web presence is considered to be a key objective of the project. This maybe through links to an existing internet site such as that operated by ARCE or a new site dedicated to the Red Monastery. A QR code linked to the webpage with the 360 view of the interior of the triconch taken by Matjaž Kačičnik was also placed on the door of the church in 2018: <https://www.360cities.net/image/red-monastery-sohag-egypt>. Such codes are now in frequent use at historic sites around the world as they give smart phone users immediate access to historical and other information pertinent to the site.

Site Presentation and Visitation Measures

The management of the Red Monastery has taken several actions to ensure that the visitors' experience to the monastery is satisfactory. Among the actions taken are:

- Construction of new toilets at a distance from the historic church. An attendant is assigned to maintain them and keep them clean.
- Opening of a new gift shop and convenience store at a distance from the historic church.
- Production and printing of small brochures on the monastery: The clergy of the Red Monastery has produced a number of small brochures on the monastery and are currently updating some of the brochures to be printed at the monastery's press. It is recommended that the brochure be downloadable from the Internet for easier access to visitors.
- Establishment of opening hours: The historic church nave is open to visitors all day. The monastery has set opening hours for the tri-conch from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm and from 6:00 pm -9:00 pm with the exception of Friday and Sunday. Visitors from distant location can plan their visit in advance and enter the church when it is suitable.

In addition to these actions, ARCE has provided displays of archaeological material in the nave and the tower as well as decorative and path lighting in all spaces accessed by visitors:

- In 2015, a display of worked stones was created south of the nave adjacent to the well. These include large limestone cornice blocks deriving from the nave, as well as fragments of friezes with crosses and other decorative motifs.
- In 2017, three display cases containing archaeological material discovered during the conservation of the tower were installed on the ground floor of the tower. Labelling of the displays was carried out as a training exercise with local inspectors and the material culture found in the tower has subsequently generated considerable interest and discussion.

Recommendations on site presentation

Although it is currently beyond the remit of the current project, it is clear that heightened national security concerns at Coptic sites are having a tangible effect at the Red Monastery. This can be seen through the provision of increased security personnel (including armoured carriers) at the site on Fridays and Sundays. Pedestrian access is also directed through scanning gates at peak festival periods. Although the present main entrance to the site from the village is cramped, it would be possible to improve both the security and visual aspects of entering the site by locating a scanner in the base of the south gate tower and building a better structure for the gatekeeper on the north side of the gate.

- 1) The ground floor of the tower should be dedicated as a visitors center for small groups, with key access provided by the church guardian. To summarize, additional visitor information panels with archival images of the church as well as images of the conservation process should be installed together with a video screen showing videos related to the site's history, art and architecture, and conservation. A presentation copy of the Red Monastery book should be mounted on a lectern as a key reference.

- 2) Consideration should be given to the provision of a banner display of key information for large groups of visitors in the nave. Supplementary information panels explaining the content and iconography of the wall paintings in the nave should be installed.

- 3) The archaeological area adjacent to the historic church should be protected and safety measures introduced for the protection of both the remains and visitors. Visitor information panels should also be provided to emphasize that the area of the historic site was once much greater than what is visible today, and that the church did not exist in isolation from other monastic buildings.

- 4) Publication of the work largely carried out under the CHTE project from 2015-19 should be planned and implemented in both traditional print and digital formats in order to maximize the impact of this important preservation project.

- 5) The Wikipedia entry and ARCE's web page for the Red Monastery have not been recently updated. This will be addressed in 2019.

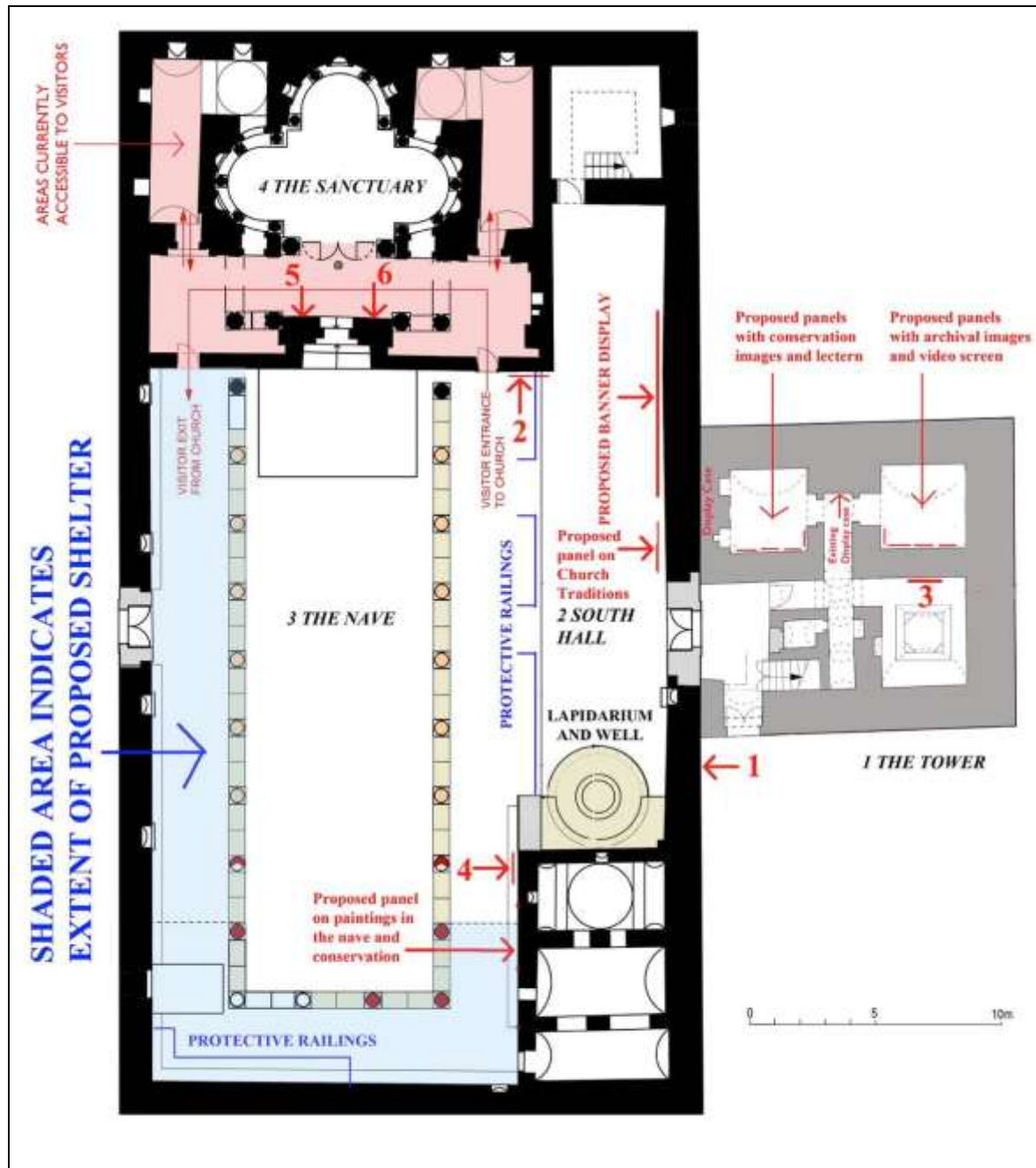


Figure 12: Plan showing existing and planned visitor information provision in church and location of proposed shelter (Drawing: N. Warner, 2019)

Maintenance and repair plan

Cleaning: In the first year of the project, two men from the community were tasked with the regular maintenance and cleaning of the sanctuary and the nave. Dina Bakhom held monthly meetings with this team to offer recommendations and guidelines regarding the maintenance procedures. The maintenance team carries out daily cleaning of the nave with a broom. As for the interior of the sanctuary, cleaning of the carpets and the floor is carried out twice per week with a vacuum cleaner. Training and supervision continued throughout the project duration by the Italian conservators on the correct procedure for the removal of the dust from the painted walls. Some members of the

group attending the local community and heritage awareness course happen to be graduates of the Faculty of Conservation, and have indicated their interest to participate in this work. Thus, personnel both within the Conservation Dept. of the MoA as well as in the Monastery are trained in dust removal.

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ARCE has provided a 6-metre-long aluminium A-frame ladder dedicated to use in the tri-conch for maintenance activities. This means there is no longer a risk of damage from using heavy and unwieldy wooden or steel ladders to access the upper levels of the church.

Waste disposal: Garbage is collected from receptacles in the nave on a daily basis. There is a systemic problem in that there are no government-sponsored waste collection services in the village, and waste is either locally incinerated or dumped on the road at the foot of the desert escarpment to the west of the Monastery. Addressing this problem was beyond the scope of the CHTE project.

Electricity: The church and its sanctuary have an entirely new electrical network installed in 2013. The system is fully earthed, with a lightning rod located on the roof of the sanctuary. The irregularity of the electricity supply at the historic church has required the installation of a dedicated 5KW electrical stabilizer to guarantee an uninterrupted supply to the lighting circuits of the church. This stabilizer is located immediately inside the main entrance to the sanctuary

Spare lighting fixtures for all types of LED lighting units, and a spare transformer, have been left with the guardian of the historic church, Abuna Shenoute, and are stored in a cupboard inside the church. The units comprise:

Phillips eW Burst Powercore, 100-277V, 2700K, 8°, Gray, Stem Mount, with spread lens (4 units on chandelier in dome and 4 units on sanctuary façade lighting)

Phillips eW Cove QLX Powercore, 12", 230V, 2700K, Wide Beam, TP2 (7 units in lower handrails in triconch)

Phillips floor mounted uplighter: BBD410 4xLED-HB-2700 12V 10 TYPE 1, 16 units with transformer ZBD401 PSU-60W 12V located in base of altar)

Locally purchased LED cove lights, 11 units on upper triconch level and 6 units in side chambers

Locally purchased 'Three Brothers' recessed uplighters in the mastabas around the perimeter of the nave. Locally purchased 'Three Brothers' recessed uplighters in walls around the lapidarium and small church of the Virgin.

Owing to the fluctuations in electrical supply and consequent failure of fittings, between the period 2013-2018, the number of Phillips cove lights in the sanctuary has been reduced, and will be phased out in favor of locally purchased LED strip lights. Abuna Shenoute has all information required to purchase new light fittings as and when required. It will be the responsibility of the monastery rather than the MoA to maintain the electrical system using local electricians, principally because the MoA has no maintenance budgets for such operations.

Water damage control: Septic tanks are presently located in two clusters: one inside the unusable entrance to the site northeast of the church (see below), and one near the modern buildings southwest of the historic church. The arrival of a government-sponsored wastewater project in the village should be monitored, and the monastery encouraged to make durable connections to this system as soon as possible. This is particularly important in view of the present and future increase in anticipated visitor numbers and water usage at the site.

Traffic management: Since 2017, visitor parking has been concentrated in an area to the west of the church with the agreement of the MoA although this is no doubt within the archaeological area (see Figure 3, above). The 2018 project to create a pedestrian only zone around the church has greatly eased the threat of damage to the historic fabric from traffic circulation in its proximity. ARCE has recommended that large tour buses do not drive past the north side of the church, as vibrations do cause stress to the building. It is unlikely that these recommendations will be heeded, however, and equally unlikely that traffic restrictions will be enforced by the MoA. Although there is a large entrance to the monastery northeast of the church, this will never be used by large vehicles as the street layout of the village beyond does not allow such vehicles space to maneuver. Thus, all traffic will continue to enter the monastery by the present main gate to the south

Budget Projection: There is no plan to introduce any entrance fee for visitors to the church. The monastery is responsible for the payment of the salaries of all custodial and cleaning staff, and their revenue stream is primarily based on visitor donations, which represent a significant income. Monthly maintenance projections have not been made but will take into account the periodic replacement of light bulbs and cleaning supplies. The bulk of the lights used in the new electrical network are extremely low wattage LED fixtures that consume a minimum of power and have long life expectancies.