

Antinoopolis February 2014 Work in the So-Called *Chiostro* at the Church beside the Assumed Eastern Gate

The spring season of excavation at Antinoopolis in 2014 directed as in the former years by Prof. Dr. Rosario Pintaudi and sponsored by the *Istituto Papirologico* “G. Vitelli” at the University of Florence (*Università degli Studi di Firenze*), originally scheduled for January-March 2014 began, due to the present political situation in Egypt, with considerable delay. It lasted in fact only from February 15 to February 28. Members of the crew were, beside R. Pintaudi as the head of the Mission, P. Grossmann, J. Heidel, L. Del Corso, B. McClain and Gertrud van Loon. The Inspectors of Antiquities Aiman Gamil and Hamada Kellawi as well as Helal Hennis (from Dayr Abu Hinnis) joint the Mission as representatives of the SCA.

The site was again found with numerous new destructions of vandalisme. Most of them were surprisingly not the results of clandestine excavations to gain valuable finds which one can later sell at the market, but were obviously caused by the desire to enjoy the fun of destruction. Not only ancient walls and pavements were destroyed but also modern repairs and restorations were pulled done. In the Colluthos church of the north necropolis of the town, which was – including the restoration of last year – already three times repaired, again no corner was left untouched (pl. 1). It was thus decided to not repair the new damages of this church, but keep everything as it is now, because any repair would immediately become a target for new destructions. It was equally necessary to cover the newly excavated structures with earth, to make them invisible.

Further excavations in the large church beside the estimated eastern gate

The newly identified large church at the estimated location of the eastern gate of the town (or of the temple of Isis according to the suggestion of A. Gayet (1)) and which we like to claim as church 2a was the main monument of

(1) Cf. A. GAYET, *Antinoë et les sépultures de Thaïs et Sérapion* (Paris 1902), pp. 8ff., figs.



Pl. 1 - Actual state of the Colluthos-church in the north-necropolis of Antinoopolis.

research activities during this season. Completely unclear was the eastern extension of the northern *pastophorium* of the sanctuary and the sizes of the later attached annexes at the northern and north-eastern sides. The narrow north-southward running mud-brick wall in the middle of the northern *pastophorium* was not a blocking of a door in a later partition wall, as it was erroneously understood by us in our last report (2), but it was a partition wall in itself dividing the room into two differently sized sections with a small door at the northern

at pp. 9, 11, 13, 15, 17; good photographs from the beginning of the last century are published by E.R. CONNELL, *John de Monins Johnson 1913/14 Egypt Exploration Fund Expedition to Antinopolis (Antinoe)*, with appendix of objects, in R. PINTAUDI (ed.), *«Antinopolis II»* [Scavi e Materiali, Edizioni dell'Istituto Papirologico "G. Vitelli", 3], Firenze 2014, pp. 415-446, esp. 419, figs. 18-19. It is reasonable to speculate on the question what might have made Gayet choose that site where he found the several fragments of huge classical columns, because non of these pieces would have emerged above ground-level. It is said that a sculpture of Isis was found in that area (consideration of Rosario Pintaudi).

(2) Cf. P. GROSSMANN, *Antinoopolis February/March 2013. Work in the So-Called Chiostro Church Assumed Eastern Gate*, *«Aegyptus»* 91 (2011), pp. 127-140, esp. 131, fig. 1.

end of the wall supplied with a protective buttress at the eastern rear side of the wall's free ending (3) (fig. 1).

Clearly later additions to the church are the rooms at the northern side of the north *pastophorium* and the following room to the east which further below will be labelled as the “north-eastern annex”. Of special interest is the way how this north-eastern annex was entered. The western entrance side of the latter was composed as a real representative façade with two doors at both extremities to the right and left (pl. 2a and 3). Both doorways differ considerably in sizes and the door jambs of both of them were in front and back equally decorated with flat pilasters of which the bases with their classical attic profiles are still everywhere in evidence and well preserved (4). Also one of the capi-



Pl. 2a - Wall section between the two doors from the southern doorjamb of the north door until the pilaster base of the later added large niche.

(3) Such protective buttresses of medium height are quite common in Egyptian mud-brick buildings. Many examples are to be found among the late antique mausolea at al-Bagawat in Kharga-Oasis, cf. A. FAKHRY, *The Necropolis of el-Bagawāt in Kharga Oasis* (Cairo 1951), *passim*.

(4) See P. GROSSMANN, art. cit., p. 133, pl. Va-b; and H.-G. SEVERIN, *Zur Bauskulptur und zur Datierung zweier Kirchenbauten in Antinopolis*, in R. PINTAUDI (ed.), *«Antinopolis II»*, cit., pp. 379-413, esp. 411, fig. 104.

tals of these pilasters was found in the debris (pl. 2b). It shows some similarities with the large column capital which was apparently used in the presumably later added transverse colonnade at the western end of the church's central nave (5), and it offers thus the possibility that both structures are in a way contemporary additions to the church.

Both doors are shaped without the usual frontal doorposts behind which usually the door pivots are inserted into the ground. But instead of this they were provided with narrow squared timbers serving as door stops. They were fixed on both sides at different positions at the feet of the door jambs, where the regularly cut in holes are in clear evidence (pl. 3). The northern door had the respective timber at the western side while the southern door had it at the eastern rear side. Because of the positions of these timbers at the thresholds of both doors which should be placed as usual at the entrance sides it appeared that the larger northernmost door served for entering and the narrower southernmost doorway for leaving the chamber. Later, however, the northern door was blocked by a strong and relatively high mud-brick wall (6). At its northern end this mud-brick wall abuts against a structure which does not exist anymore. Probably a door jamb as at the other side of the door was present here.

Between both doorways the façade (entrance side) of the following room is provided by an apparently later installed broad and richly decorated niche between both doors flanked on both sides with engaged columns of which unfortunately only the well executed bases survive *in situ* (7) (pl. 4a-b). Apparently these bases were re-used spoils from other buildings. They were at least added during a later occasion. Below the sill of this niche which corresponds roughly with the floor level of the chamber one sees still the straight foundation of the original design (pl. 4b). Unfortunately a few days after its discovery the whole structure was destroyed by vandalisms.

Of the room proper, the so-called north-eastern annex, behind the described façade only the foundations survive (fig. 1). The room is a relatively large, transversely emphasized chamber. Its eastern wall contains roughly the middle

(5) P. GROSSMANN, art. cit., pp. 129f., fig. 1, pl. Va-b.

(6) Since the northern doorjamb of the northern door was not found *in situ* and even traces were not in evidence, one has to consider also the possibility that both doors were originally of equal widths, but that the missing doorjamb got later lost for any reason.

(7) At the day of its excavation also the inner corner indicating the depth of the niche was still in evidence, but was destroyed in the following night by some people from the nearby situated village of Shaykh Abada.



Pl. 2b - Capital of one ↑
of the pilasters flanking one
of the two doors.



← Pl. 3 - Entrance wall
of the reception hall
(view from the north).



Pl. 4a

Pl. 4b



Pl. 4a-b - Views on the later introduced niche between the two doors.



Pl. 5a - Foundation of the presumed apse in the eastern wall of the reception hall.

a rectangular outer extension (pl. 5a) which appears very much as the necessarily rear extension of a small apse located at this position (8). In addition two small lateral buttresses projecting out of the western inner side of the wall might be explained as the foundations of a pair of two flanking pilasters or engaged columns.

Unusual are the proportions of this chamber. Under normal conditions such an apse should have been situated more or less in the middle of the wall. This means that the whole chamber would have continued still considerably further to the north. Secondly although the presumable apse is pointing to the east it appears doubtful that the north-eastern annex would have served as an additional church (*parecclesion*) or chapel for the performance of liturgical services. It seems more reasonable to explain this room as something as a recep-

(8) Another example of such kind of enforcement has the south church of Hermopolis Magna (modern Ashmunayn) on the opposite side of the river, cf. P. GROSSMANN, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten* (HdO, sect. 1, vol. 62), Leiden 2002, pp. 437ff., fig. 58.

tion hall and would thus represent an important chamber of an Episcopal palace (9) (*episcopium*).

In a similar sense also the peristyl to the west of the described chambers should be seen. Very many ancient palaces, governmental and private ones, are supplied with peristyls to which similar reception halls are also attached (10). Until now from this peristyl at the church 2a only a corner pillar and a very eroded column base could have been unearthed. There is hope, however, that further elements of the peristyl are still covered with earth and can once be exposed. The high top layer of the earth covering the mentioned remains is apparently the excavation dump of A. Gayet who was looking in this area for the remains of the temple of Isis and by doing so he destroyed the pavement of the central nave of this church.

Searching for the western end of the church

What has been unearthed so far of this new and large basilica at Antinoopolis does not give a satisfactory idea of its size, its total length and the approximate position of a narthex or at least of a western entrance wall. There was little hope to find something of this kind below a typical, c. 3.00 meters high dumping hill close to the preserved western extension of the church. This hill dates apparently from the time of the activities of A. Gayet in this region, and he would hardly have left anything untouched from late antiquity that might have covered anything of the temple of Isis which according to A. Gayet was situated in this region (11). But since there was no other choice we started to dig a trench through that hill hoping that at least something would have been left. Indeed, we were successful. In the direct continuation of the broad east-west running southern outer wall of the church a similar wall could have been

(9) Regarding other examples of episcopal residences, cf. W. MÜLLER-WIENER, *Bischofsresidenzen des 4.-7. Jhs. im östlichen Mittelmeerraum*, «Actes du XI^e congrès international d'Archéologie chrétienne, Lyon 21-28 septembre 1986» vol. I (Rome 1989), pp. 651-709, esp. 704ff., fig. 25 with examples of reception halls, demonstrating that it was quite normal that Episcopal palaces were supplied with such kinds of public chambers.

(10) See also the examples which R. REBUFFAT, *Maisons à péristyle d'Afrique du Nord*. Répertoire de plans publiés I., «MEFRA» 81 (1969), pp. 659-724; II., «MEFRA» 86 (1974), pp. 445-499, has collected from North African towns.

(11) GAYET, op. cit., pp. 8ff.

unearthed which obviously belongs to the same structure as the church (fig. 1). We did not reach the very western end of this wall, but also another wall was uncovered, which runs now from south to north and abuts against the northern side of that outer southern wall just described (pl. 5b). This second wall represents a partition wall between the *naos* of the church and the western narthex or of anything else situated beyond that partition wall. Whether further elements would emerge below the balks of the hill we do not know. At least we would welcome some further elements of the interior composition of the narthex. However, what has been found until now is already enough to gain an at least rough idea of the length of the church.

Both mentioned walls are not bound together. There is a clear joint between them, and also the kind of the masonry is different. While the core of the southern outer wall of the church consists of rubble bound with clay mortar and faced with small dressed limestone blocks, as this was the case with the already known sections of that wall further to the east, in the north-south running transverse wall only lime-gypsum mortar was used in the outer facing as well in the core. In addition the southern outer wall shows at the connecting position a straight facing of small dressed limestone blocks while the north-south running transverse wall shows at the same position irregular rubble masonry.

The unearthed remains of this partition wall of the ‘narthex’ or of other chambers at that position give also some ideas about the meaning of the later added western colonnade with larger columns mentioned already in our last



Pl. 5b - Newly excavated walls of the narthex of the new church 2a.

report (12). Under normal conditions and according to the normal shape of an Upper-Egyptian church a transverse colonnade is to be expected at the westernmost column base of the northern row to separate a western return aisle from the central nave (13) as this belongs to the normal design of every Egyptian basilica in Late Antiquity. The later added western colonnade with larger columns would thus have formed a second western return aisle which appears, however, very unlikely to be the case. Apart from this unrealistic solution, there are three further possibilities to be considered as explanation of this question:

1. A western return aisle did from the beginning not exist but later recognized as necessarily needed to be added, which was realized as an occasionally stronger structure,
2. an already existing return aisle appeared to be too narrow and was thus necessarily enlarged by dismantling the already existing western transverse colonnade (although when following the last existing column base, that return aisle would be noticeable wider than the lateral aisles of the church),
3. the load from the upper storey upon the colonnade was too heavy and the existing colonnade threatened to collapse and was thus necessarily replaced by a stronger one.

Of these three possibilities the first one can immediately be rejected, because it is not imaginable that an official large church in Upper Egypt would have been built without a western return aisle. Of the remaining two other possibilities the second one is the most convincing, because in the case of a collapsing colonnade (third possibility) one would have replaced it at the same position.

Apparently slightly further to the west from the last surviving column base of the northern row the pavement of the church is equally interrupted as for a column at this place. But this seems to be a misleading observation. The distance to the estimated prolongation of the newly discovered western wall would become too narrow for the addition of a western colonnade to form a western return aisle at that position.

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(12) See our discussion in P. GROSSMANN, *Antinoopolis February/March 2013*, «Aegyptus» 91 (2011), pp. 127-140, esp. 132f.

(13) P. GROSSMANN, *Christliche Architektur*, cit., pp. 18f., 107.

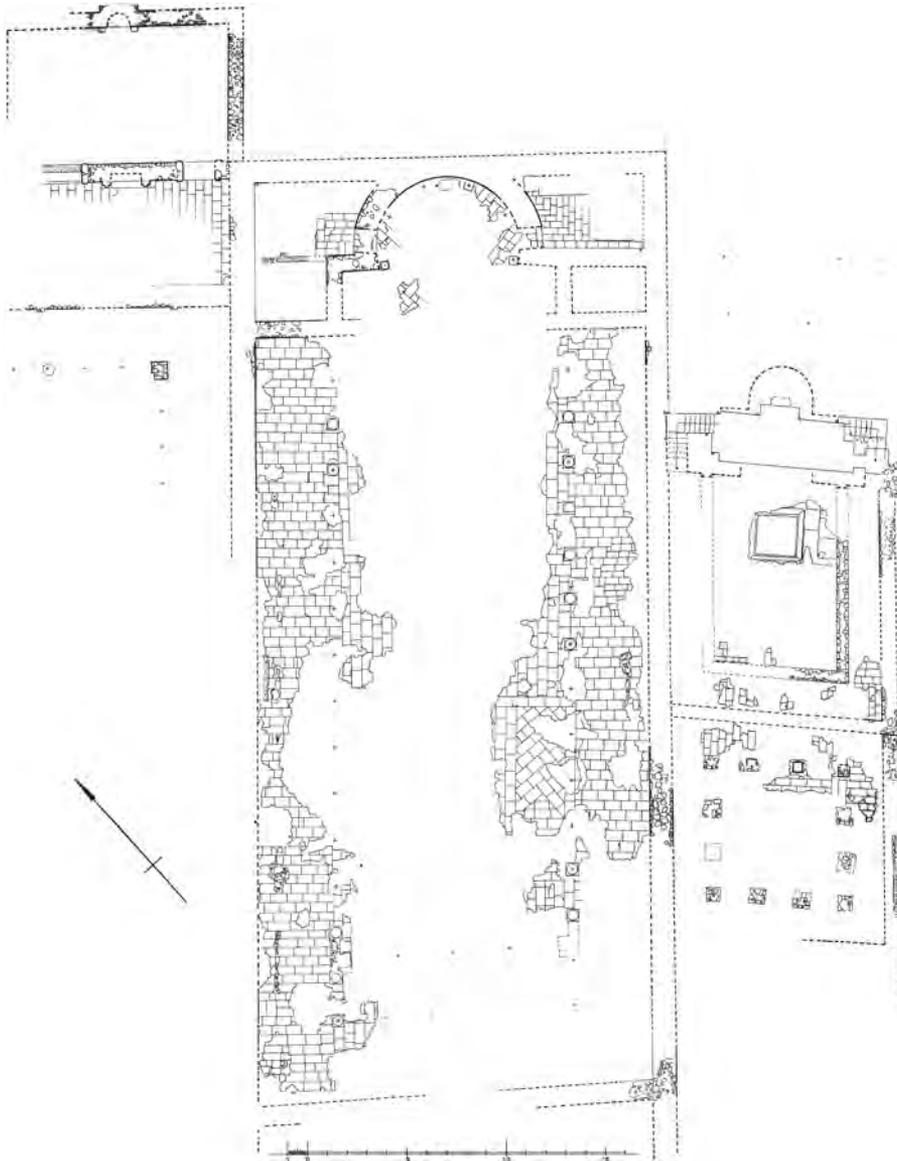


Fig. 1. Plan of the new church 2a (state February 2014).