

FOREWORDS

The discovery of the cathedral in Faras and especially its wall paintings has become legendary over the years. It proved to be the crowning of Professor Kazimierz Michałowski's scholarly career and at the same time the most successful debut of Polish archaeology in Sudan, prompted by the Professor who was also the founder of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw. The excavations in Faras led to other Polish archaeological projects which years later are still in the field.

The situation did not look so bright at first. When the UNESCO international campaign to save the monuments of Nubia was announced, following plans to build a dam in Aswan, Polish archaeology had just returned to the field in Egypt. The world war had caused a major gap and the postwar years were difficult all around. Aware of the inexperience of the young generation of archaeologists in Poland, yet mindful of the wartime losses to Polish cultural heritage, Michałowski had no doubt that we had to be present in Nubia, helping to salvage ancient monuments. He chose to excavate Faras simply because there were reported Pharaonic remains there.

During the second season the team uncovered the first wall paintings in the ruins of a cathedral concealed under the remains of an Arabic fortress. It was then, in the middle of the winter of 1961/1962, that a new field of research — Nubiology — was born. Neither Michałowski nor his team knew that then. The wall paintings and countless inscriptions, some integrally connected with the images, that were discovered then became a mine of data on an unknown and underestimated period in the history of Nubia, namely, late antiquity and early medieval times. The finds from Faras led to new insight on the culture and history of Nubia, as well as on its ties with the contemporary civilized world.

The discovery of early Christian Nubian art in Faras was one of the greatest surprises of the UNESCO campaign, but the rigors of a salvage operation imposed severe restrictions. There was very little time to excavate the cathedral and its foundations, and more importantly, to uncover all of the wall paintings. The importance of the paintings for the cultural heritage of Sudan was clear from the start, as was the imperative to save as many of these images. There was no doubt that the paintings had to be removed from the walls and transported out of Faras. There was no doubt, too, that not all the images could be saved. Whatever was left in place would soon disappear in the waters of the new lake forming behind the dam in Aswan.

For the next three seasons archaeologists and conservators from Poland fought against time and matter. The biggest technical problem was how to take down the wall paintings and move them to a safe location. The late Józef Gazy was the chief miracle-maker among the conservators brought to Faras. Most of the wall paintings were saved; the deal that Michałowski made with the Sudanese Antiquities Service was that the paintings were divided between two national museums, one in Khartoum and the other in Warsaw.

From the moment that they were discovered the wall paintings from Faras entered the stream of world scholarly discourse, becoming the object of of-

ten still ongoing debate. Not surprisingly, the task of publishing them as a set took a long time to complete. A veteran of the excavations in Faras, Stefan Jakobielski, a young man at the time who dedicated his entire life to the new discipline, Nubiology, fulfilled this task. Complementing his work is a chapter on issues of the painting manner, written by Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka, an expert on early Christian Nubian wall painting from Nubia. More importantly, the catalogue, which presents nominally 154 wall paintings, includes also images that were not saved; this documentation is the only remaining trace of such representations. While discerning between documentation and interpretation, Jakobielski as the main author and editor does not ignore the discussion and opinions on their subject that were formed during the half a century that has passed since their discovery and the progress in studies of ancient Nubia. Thus, the book is not a belated catalogue of the finds, but a study fully reflecting the development of Nubiology as a science.

The book is the second and last publication in our series devoted to the ancient Pachoras. The finds were a source of inspiration for successive generations of scholars. The monograph is the fruit of labour of the authors and a whole group of collaborators engaged in producing scholarly descriptions of particular images. It is to be hoped that this book will showcase Polish Nubiology for many years to come, always calling to mind the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw and the glorious traditions of Polish archaeology in the Mediterranean and the Near East.

Prof. Piotr Bieliński
Dr. Tomasz Waliszewski
FORMER AND PRESENT DIRECTOR
POLISH CENTRE OF MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

The gallery of wall paintings, architectural fragments and inscriptions from the Faras Cathedral has become a true treasure of the National Museum in Warsaw. The surprising, unexpected and, indeed, splendid collection of art born far away from Poland has been a witness to the competence and extraordinary skills of Polish archaeologists and conservators led by Professor Kazimierz Michałowski, a deputy director of the National Museum in Warsaw for several decades.

In 2014, the Faras Gallery was redesigned and modernized thanks to the generous donation from Mr. Wojciech Pawłowski and his family. The new installation includes several features helping to best accommodate both the objects and the viewers. The exhibition tells the story of the discovery and salvage of the great art treasure, and presents murals and architectural fragments against a background which alludes to the original setting.

The reopening of the Gallery in the presence of the President of the Republic of Poland became an important cultural event. We were particularly happy to host here the Director of the Museum in Khartoum – the owner of the other half of the treasure from Faras. Let me express my deep satisfaction with the fact that the two parts of this monumental collection have been reunited in this volume.

Agnieszka Morawińska
DIRECTOR
NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW

The first time I met Professor Stefan Jakobielski was at the Sudan Antiquities Service where he came to ask for travel permits and the license to excavate in Old Dongola. He introduced himself and from the beginning I realized his friendly and gentle character. The second time I visited him with our former Director General Dr. Hassan Hussein Idriss during a general inspection visit to the archaeological missions in Northern Sudan, and that was my first visit to Old Dongola which the Polish Mission was excavating. He explained for us thoroughly the site with all its complexity, and the demonstration was really appreciated by all my colleagues. It was thanks to the eminent Professor Kazimierz Michałowski who created the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology. Later I found out that Stefan had assisted Professor Michałowski in the rescue operations of the Nubian Campaign, notably the rescue of the Cathedral of Faras, which yielded a collection of 150 outstanding mural paintings from the early Christian period, never found before in such abundance in Nubia. They are of universal value and authenticity, and reflect a tradition of interior painted decoration that lasted for almost 700 years, from the 7th to the 14th century. They illustrate the iconographic development of art in Nubia with the assimilation of some Coptic and Byzantine ideas. Sudan is proud to have these paintings presented at the Sudan National Museum and the National Museum of Warsaw, making them available to the general public all over the world and illuminating our cultural heritage in Europe. Another positive impact is that the discovery of these mural paintings led to the birth of Nubiology as a field of science and the foundation of the International Society for Nubian Studies, which became an effective platform to promote the archaeology of Sudan and interdisciplinary research associated with it worldwide. This is thanks to Polish archaeologist because it is through their work that Christian archaeology is well founded and known in Sudan, and the discovered treasures decorate now our national museums.

Abdelrahman Ali Mohamed
DIRECTOR GENERAL
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Every great archaeological discovery is a milestone in recreating the past. That was true also in the case of the discovery of the medieval cathedral in Faras. Called “a miracle from Faras”, it not only turned out to be a scientific sensation but also led to the emergence of a new discipline, Nubiology.

Before Faras research on ancient Nubia was conducted from the perspective of ancient Egypt; only later did Nubiology take its rightful place. The wall paintings from Faras are a crown jewel of the National Museum in Warsaw collection, recently reopened in a new and highly climatic exhibition. Having been the object of scientific research for several dozen years, they have contributed to the extended studies of several generations of Polish Nubiologists and will most certainly continue to be an inspiration for young researchers from all over the world. This volume by Stefan Jakobielski, who participated in the excavations in Faras from the very beginning, crowns the long-standing research on the chronology of the paintings and will remain for a long time a road sign and a model for research of the highest standard.

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