The Art of Monasticism: Aesthetic Manifestations of the Angelic Life in Late Antique Upper Egypt

An Illustrated Public Lecture by Elizabeth S. Bolman
Tyler School of Art
Temple University
Philadelphia

Thursday, April 23, 2009 at 5:30 pm
Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection
The Music Room
Reservations required: 202-339-6940 or evansp@doaks.org

One of the places where Christian monasticism first came into being, and then flourished, is Egypt. Thousands of men and women attempted to abandon the world, and to forsake normal human interests and needs, as if dead to the flesh. Late antique contemporaries regarded the best practitioners of this spiritual way of life as angels, and called monasticism the angelic life.

For well over a decade, Elizabeth Bolman has studied the material and artistic remains of early and medieval monasticism in Egypt. She is the director of a project to conserve and analyze the late antique wall paintings in a monumental church that once served an extended monastic federation, in Upper Egypt. The two principal centers of the federation, popularly known as the Red and White Monasteries, contain a phenomenal array of surviving physical and textual data dating from the fifth through the eighth centuries C.E. In collaboration with a wide range of specialists, Bolman has been documenting, conserving, excavating, and analyzing these remarkable traces of ancient Christian asceticism.

In her lecture, she will present an overview of this work, and will focus on the dramatic, newly revealed wall paintings in the Red Monastery church.