A History of Preservation and Value Assessment of the White Monastery Church

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# Table of Contents

Abstract 2  
Acknowledgments 3  
Chapter 1: Introduction 5  
Chapter 2: A Survey of the White Monastery Site and its Current Conditions 9  
  2.1: The Current Conditions of the White Monastery 9  
  2.2: The Current Conditions of the Historic Church 12  
Chapter 3: A Model for Value Assessment in Preservation 16  
Chapter 4: Stakeholders in the White Monastery and Their Values 25  
  4.1: Monks' Value Attribution at the White Monastery 27  
  4.2: Visitor's Value Attribution at the White Monastery 35  
  4.3: International Organization's Value Attribution at the White Monastery 42  
  4.4: Government Inspector's Value Attribution at the White Monastery 44  
Chapter 5: A History of the Preservation of the The White Monastery 47  
  5.1: Origins of the White Monastery 47  
  5.2: History of Preservation and Value Assessment of the Historic Church 49  
Chapter 6: Conclusion 60  
Bibliography 65
Abstract

A comprehensive value-based assessment is critical in informing preservation efforts, communicating to preservationists what on a given site is worth preserving and why. The study of preservation of the historic church at the White Monastery overtime gives us an understanding of which values, and which stakeholders, have historically had the most influence in guiding preservation and restoration efforts on the site. We see consistently that preservation efforts on the historic church are motivated primarily by stakeholders’ religious values, and that areas of great religious value on the site are historically the most well-maintained. It is therefore of the utmost importance that future preservation efforts are guided by an understanding of the historic church’s value to stakeholders, and that they prioritize structures of religious value, such as the historic church, and the sanctuary therein.
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“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” - Ephesians 2:10

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Monastery of St. Shenoute the Archimandrite, commonly known as the White Monastery because of its white limestone church construction, dates back to the fifth century. This monastery is known as a place of worship, a social life force, and an educational asset for the surrounding community. Throughout the centuries, the physical structures that comprise the historic church have undergone significant physical erosion as hundreds of thousands have inhabited, visited, and studied the site over time.

Although built in the fifth century, the White Monastery’s historic church has never been the subject of significant preservation efforts. Its most robust preservation effort began in 2021 and addressed a fallen wall in the historic church’s north corner. Today, only the nave and sanctuary on the northeast end and the entrance walkway on the southeast end can be accessed. What is today considered a courtyard, now closed off to the public, was once utilized to accommodate thousands of people as the historic church’s nave. The current state of the historic church, relative to its original form, inspired a curiosity in me to study the preservation of the site over time.

In order to assess factors that impinge on preservation, we must determine what values are attributed to the site by relevant stakeholders. These values reveal the significance of the site, and therefore, the value assessment is the first step of the preservation efforts of the site. Values are determined by stakeholders or groups of people who have a relationship with the site. It is crucial to identify the stakeholders, as these groups have varying, overlapping needs for and expectations of the building.
This thesis aims to create a value-based assessment to understand how the attributions of the White Monastery are held and weighed by the different stakeholders that interact and are involved onsite. Analyzing these values creates a foundational argument for the contemporary preservation of the historic church.

I will outline and define the complex roles of each stakeholder group and the values which they attribute to the historic church. I will analyze four values (religious value, historical value, socio-cultural value, and economic value) with four groups of stakeholders. These values were determined based on onsite observations, interviews, and an extensive literature review of the historic church’s history. I chose these stakeholders due to their significant involvement, interaction with the site, and collective influence on the preservation efforts. By no means are these stakeholders and values the only ones that are relevant to this monastery and its historic church. However, I have identified them as the most integral to the preservation argument.

First, I performed a literature review to form a theoretical background and to derive a value-based assessment model. I identified studies most applicable to my current body of work, one that utilized various values to explore historical sites’ preservation potential. The chosen scholars utilized value frameworks that best aligned with the values I found relevant to my study of the White Monastery. I also researched the history of the White Monastery, including the development and physical conditions of the historic church over time.

I then conducted a field survey of the White Monastery, during which I observed the site’s current structure and types of visitor engagement with the site. I also interviewed the resident monks and current research project leaders, and performed
archival surveys. I then applied my understanding of historical preservation efforts and the values of each stakeholder to inform a recommendation for future preservation activity on the site.

Although researched extensively, there are several limitations to consider. I was limited by the lack of published literature on the values of relevant stakeholders and the amount of time I could dedicate to observing these stakeholders during my onsite visit. I originally considered the larger set of stakeholders than is covered in this document, but access to information regarding the actions and motivations of some of these stakeholders was limited. Consequently, I decided to analyze the values of only a subset, focusing on those who directly impact the preservation of the site. Considering these limitations, I evaluated an essential set of stakeholders and values to assess the historic church's contemporary preservation.

It is crucial to define and understand the terminology of ‘monastery’ and ‘historic church’ as these terms are used throughout my thesis. A monastery, in this context, is a site of both vocation and living for monks instituted to supply space for spiritual, social, and economic growth for its community and visitors. With in the monastery you have the historical church. The historic church, in this context, is the white limestone structure that was built when the monastery was first established in the fifth century. This is the monastery's original and main church.

The structure of my thesis is as follows. I will first speak about the current conditions of the monastery. Examining the land surrounding the historic church benefits our understanding of how recent developments affect the building's values and preservation. I then expand on the theoretical background of value assessments. I
specifically cite five scholars who have helped shape and define the idea of the value of a site in preservation. Following the theoretical background, I present my value assessment, looking at the way in which each of my four stakeholder groups attributes value to the historic churchmonastery and specific sections therein. I then go into the history and timeline of the White Monastery. This timeline helps us examine historical preservation events, and takes into consideration manuscripts, inscriptions, and documentation from past travelers over centuries. The timeline also reflects all past preservation efforts as I analyzes the values that drove those preservation efforts. Lastly, I summarize my findings from my value assessment, highlighting the driving forces for historical preservation and suggesting where future efforts may be most effectively invested.
Chapter 2: A Survey of the White Monastery Site and its Current Conditions

2.1: The Current Conditions of the White Monastery

The White Monastery is located in Sohag on the west bank of Egypt's Nile River. According to archeological evidence, the monastery reached its largest land size at 77,500 m\(^2\) in the fifth and seventh centuries.\(^1\) In 1997, the monastery was officially reinstated in the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria by Pope Shenouda III. This triggered efforts to re-engage the monastery with its community.\(^2\) Figures 21.1 and 21.2 at the end of the document show the site's current map with all of its newer developed buildings.

Upon visiting the White Monastery in December 2022, I observed that it operates differently than other monasteries. There exists a stereotype of monasteries that they have strict rules regarding monks' engagement with the outside world, and that monks are rarely seen interacting with visitors, if seen at all for that matter. While this stereotype may be accurate in some cases, the White Monastery is quite different, as its monks are abundantly active in the community. In some respects, the monastery's lands are an asset to the community and, in many ways, essential. Community members, often whole families, visit the site regularly to partake in religious services, attend religious classes, and even eat and socialize. Emmel and Layton have defined the functionality of a monastery in the fifth century by dividing the historic church into three

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1 Blanke, *An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism*. 34.
2 Blanke. 51.
functional parts: a zone designated for religious worship (this includes churches and refectories), a zone for lodging (i.e., cells for the monks and dormitories for visitors, and a zone for economic activities. This description is very similar to what we see on site today.

Upon evaluation of the site, we see newer developments around the historic church of the monastery. A few of these buildings are new churches, serving similar purposes as the historic church building. One might ask why the monastery invested in new buildings rather than restoring the existing one. In order to answer this question, we must understand a few things about the religious practices performed within the church.

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Namely, we must understand the significance of the altar, which considered the holiest place in the church, and its usage. The Coptic church believes that during the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the heavens come down to earth and rest upon the altar. It is for this reason that we consistently see the sanctuary (which contains the altar) prioritized by historic preservation efforts. It is also important to note that when an altar is used (prayed on) for the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, it can only be utilized once daily. The monastery's many congregants cannot be divided across multiple liturgical services in the same building on the same altar. Therefore, one reason for the construction of the new churches is to accommodate the throngs of congregants and allow the monastery to hold simultaneous services for the convenience of the community.

In addition, having multiple churches that perform the same function also prevents tangible stress on the historic church. The building is very delicate, and some regions of the church are blocked for the safety of those onsite. The construction of newer churches on the site, adjacent to the historic church, also emphasizes the influence of religious value on preservation/construction decisions made at the historic church. These new developments take the burden of the consistent liturgical services off of the historic church. This redistribution of usage should be considered an act of preservation, since it prevents excess usage of the historic church that might otherwise expedite its deterioration.
2.2: The Current Conditions of the Historic Church

One ideology that has stayed consistent over the years is the idea that churches are the nuclei of religious life. Blanke mentions, "churches serve as a focal point for the monastery’s religious life and as a gathering point for all monastics several times each day." The monastery is located northwest in the city of Sohag, with the historic church measuring to 35 x 76 m and with 13 m high exterior walls feet wide with no roof. This is the first and oldest standing building on the site. It consists of a nave, a large courtyard, altars, transepts, and a baptistry.

![Figure 2. Monneret de Villard’s reconstructed plan of the White Monastery church. After U. Monneret de Villard, Les couvents près de Sohâg (Deyr el-Abiad et Deyr el-Âhmar), Volume 1, Milan: Tipografia Pontificia e Arcivescovile S. Giuseppe, 1925, pl. 3](image)

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5 “The Church of St. Shenoute | Yale Egyptology.”
Before the monastery was officially reinstated in 1997, the church was intermittently used for purposes other than hosting monastic life. According to textual evidence, it was a pilgrimage site sometime in the early fifth or sixth century. This means that many of the conditions we see on site are not necessarily the result of monastic practice but may also be a product of other unknown events within the historic church's walls. The White Monastery's historic church has areas of vulnerability, currently barricaded for safety reasons, whereas other sections are fully active. For example, the former nave of the original construction is designated as a courtyard. It is inaccessible to residents and visitors alike due to the dangers of the collapsed limestone wall on the north side of the building. In addition, the ancient baptistry room and well are blocked from use.

To enter the building, one must go through the main south gate, which leads to the pharaonic relics, now considered the historic church's narthex. The open courtyard is visible facing north, with all its ruins inside. To the east, there is an information desk and guard booth. Going west through the narthex, the bookstore is front-facing, where religious items are sold. To the right of the bookstore is the entrance of the nave, or the gathering place for congregants attending liturgical and other ceremonial services. In the nave, the main church connects to the sanctuary. On each side of the main church, a transept leads to other areas. On the south side, there is a consecrated baptistry and another sanctuary with an altar. On the north side, a stairwell leads to the upper chapel where St. Shenoute's office was located.

The most active part of this church is where religious services are held. These areas are more compact because of the structural limitations. Just as in other churches,

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These functional spaces are used by the clergy and congregation for religious practices and historical reminiscing. The altar is where sacramental services, such as the prayer of the Holy Eucharist, are practiced. The congregation sits on the outskirts of the altar while prayers are being held. The baptismry room is used for baptisms throughout the year. When visitors come through, they stand in the nave before the altar if they choose to pray. As visitors, tourists, or students come in, they look around to indulge in the historical characteristics of the building.

Although space is limited, monks and bishops at the site have stated that they are pleased that they can still pray comfortably.\(^7\) Below are images of the sanctuary (Figure 7) and the courtyard from the view in the walkways (Figure 4)

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\(^7\) al-Shenouti, Interview with Fr. Athanasius al-Shenouti.
Figure 4. Image of the south-facing wall from inside the historic church at the White Monastery, 2022 (Photo taken by Damiana Yousef)
Chapter 3: A Model for Value Assessment in Preservation

When preserving a historical or cultural heritage site, a preservationist must assess the site's needs and triage them, taking into account stakeholder’s needs and priorities. First, a thorough site survey with extensive documentation is conducted. Then, priorities are synthesized by gathering input from stakeholders. The collection of this data is imperative, as it not only informs preservation decisions, but is also leveraged to develop an action plan and timeline for the preservation\(^8\). Ultimately, each assessment seeks to answer the question: "What should be preserved, and why does it deserve to be preserved?" To answer this question, researchers conduct a value assessment to identify the site's stakeholders and understand what values each attributes to the site.

When discussing the importance of values in historic preservation, preservationist and planner Erica Avrami states that:

Values are the subject of much discussion in contemporary society. The search for values and meaning has become a pressing concern in this postmodern, post-ideology, post-nation-state age. In the field of cultural heritage preservation, values are critical to deciding what to conserve —what material goods will represent us and our past to future generations— as well as to determining how to conserve.\(^9\)

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\(^8\) Kilinç, “Value Assessment For Industrial Heritage In Zonguldak.” 72.
\(^9\) Avrami et al., *Values and Heritage Conservation*. 1.
Values carry a myriad of meanings. For example, the heritage value attributed to a site encompasses the site's aesthetic, historical, scientific, social, or spiritual significance for past, present, and future generations.\textsuperscript{10}

Randall Mason, a prominent scholar in the field, delineates the primary challenges and opportunities in valuing heritage. The challenges Mason refers to are understanding the complexity and diversity of values, navigating conflicting value interests, observing the change of values over time, having access to limited resources and capabilities, lacking data and information, and dealing with culture, sensitivity, and sensitivity and inclusivity.\textsuperscript{11} Mason discusses how values are inherently subjective and codependent on multiple elements. With this, he argues and introduces the idea of "value negotiation," where identification and engagement with multiple stakeholders is necessary to understand their varying perspectives and priorities.\textsuperscript{12} Several approaches exist to conduct a "value negotiation," such as surveys, participatory processes, and expert assessment.

In addition to value negotiation, Mason also discussed the importance of balancing different values relative to one another when making preservation decisions.\textsuperscript{13} When looking into a cultural heritage site, each stakeholder assigns different importance to a value that may be universally shared. Mason also argues that values can conflict with one another. For this reason, it is vital to review the potential gains and losses during decision-making. Since all values are codependent and intertwined, Mason suggests finding multiple cross-values and adjusting their definitions for a more

\textsuperscript{10} Labadi and Logan, \textit{Urban Heritage, Development and Sustainability}.
\textsuperscript{11} Mason, \textit{Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage}. 15.
\textsuperscript{12} Mason. 17.
\textsuperscript{13} Mason. 11.
balanced approach to preservation planning. Just because one value seems essential to a particular stakeholder does not mean that is what will be most beneficial to the site.\(^\text{14}\) Assessing heritage value on a site becomes complex and dynamic, so flexibility is key when approaching each site.

Additionally, stakeholder values are subject to change overtime, and each generation may have a different concept of what is valuable. For example, there exist buildings that were initially constructed to be monuments, but now serve more functional purposes for some members of the community in which buildings exist. Still, other members of the community may continue to value these buildings as a monument, preserve the memory of a historical event.\(^\text{15}\)

Scholars utilize varied approaches to conduct and assess the value of a site. The following comparative literature review demonstrates that the evaluation of the value of a site rich in cultural heritage is not formulaic nor standardized, but rather nuanced and subjective. In my review, I will summarize and analyze the value discussions of four scholars who speak on the particular values that I have noted to be relevant in the study of the historic church at the White Monastery: religious, historical, economic, and socio-cultural.

Religious value reflects the beliefs and practices of faith communities. It is often deeply intertwined with cultural identity. The Burra Charter, published in 1998, discerns that religious values are important to cultural heritage places, and defines a set of guidelines for preserving and managing these spaces. The Burra Charter recognizes that religious values may be expressed in various ways. This includes the physical

\(^{14}\) Mason. 15.

fabric of a place, its associations with religious practices and traditions, and its connections to spiritual beliefs and values. The Burra Charter also emphasizes the importance of consultation and engagement with communities when assessing the religious values of a cultural heritage place. It is also essential to consider other tangible elements associated with religious practices. In religious spaces, many spiritual elements are associated with tangible objects used in sacraments, such as garments, vessels, and consecrated altars. The Burra Charter notes that the existence of these elements on a site contributes to its religious value.

Unlike the Burra Charter of 1998, Mason believes that the religious value of a heritage site mirrors one's faith, beliefs, and practices. Mason defines religious value as significant emotional or spiritual associations with a belief or set of practices. These can shape an individual's identity, and can be shared with others in the community. As previously mentioned, religious values often get entangled with cultural identities. In the case of the historic church at the White Monastery, many religious practices become a cultural element as these actions are repetitive and routine. People who interact with the space religiously do it to gain a sense of meaning, whether spiritual, emotional, or mental.

Understanding the spiritual relationship that stakeholders have with the site is best developed via a participatory approach, which can be challenging. Engaging with the beliefs and practices of believers is essential to understand the religious value of the site to stakeholders. As mentioned above, religious values can also hold social and

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16 Australia/ICOMOS, The Burra Charter. 4.
17 Australia/ICOMOS. 9.
18 Mason, Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage. 35.
19 Mason. 37.
cultural importance within the community. Religious value can be essential in shaping a cultural site as it promotes tourism and economic activity.²⁰

Historical value refers to the way by which sites and objects can provide a tangible link to history, allowing people to connect with the past meaningfully. Historical value can be enhanced by the quality and integrity of the physical fabric of heritage and by the richness of the stories and narratives associated with it. Studying Alois Riegl, who was the first to develop a systematic analysis of heritage values and the restoration theory, has been essential to my analysis of historic value.²¹ Riegl's writing classifies commemorative and present-day values. Commemorative values consider historical value, international importance, and the commemorative aspect of a site. The present-day value Riegl speaks of is the idea of tangible use and artistic value.²² Although Riegl mainly focused on the idea of preservation with monuments and artwork, we can adapt his conclusions to look at larger sites.²³ Riegl believed that historical value is different from aesthetic values. These concepts are closely associated, but one does not rely on the other.²⁴ For example, the historic church's historical importance will always remain regardless of how it physically appears, as the physical space maintains the remembrance of the monastery's history. Riegl emphasizes though that the artwork itself is not the source of the historical value. Rather it is the cultural associations/relevance of the artwork that breed its historical value. An element holds historical value only in so much as a stakeholder is able to understand and appreciate

²⁰ Mason. 15.
²² Riegl, The Modern Cult of Monuments. 31.
²³ Riegl. 31-32.
²⁴ Riegl. 31-32.
its cultural relevance and importance. This is important because the present day understanding of history helps shape the value of the object in question. For example, a piece of pottery that could have been once considered very valuable may lose its historical importance due to the lack of cultural context that once gave this piece of pottery value. Theoretically, the historic church is only a historical site because the community, in this case, our stakeholders, continue to consider it a historic site.

Mason also considers the idea and importance of historical value, and highlights how a heritage site documents the past. Heritage sites provide a physical and tangible link to the past, allowing those who encounter these elements to connect with the past. Mason also states that the originality and integrity of heritage influence a site’s historical value, especially how it is preserved and protected over time. Seeing a history of maintenance efforts gives greater meaning and suggests that many generations have found a reason to preserve the history. Mason states that it is essential to recognize the importance of preservation and the need for adaptive reuse and development.

Mason’s view of historical heritage is similar to the religious value in that cultural and social benefits are engaged. This creates a constant dialogue between the past and present, which will change and adapt over time with future generations.

Socio-cultural value is perhaps the most complex heritage value. It encompasses the social and cultural value that individuals attribute to the site in question. These meanings can be profoundly personal and emotional, tied to individuals’ identities, beliefs, and values. At the same time, socio-cultural value is also collective, reflecting

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25 Riegler 41-42.
26 Mason, Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage. 15.
27 Mason. 11.
28 Mason. 11.
29 Mason. 11.
communities' and societies' shared meanings and practices. Mason has the best definition of socio-cultural value, suggesting that the socio-cultural value of a site mirrors cultural identities from not only the area but traditions and beliefs adapted from all over the world.\(^3\) At the White Monastery, we see these deeper emotional connections shared among most, if not all, the stakeholders. Like religious value, socio-cultural value can be challenging to assess as it involves direct engagement with the potentially sensitive and personal aspects of a stakeholder's interests. However, this close inspection of the personal perspective and priorities of these stakeholders is necessary for a complete understanding.\(^3\)

Lastly, heritage sites and objects may also be of great economic value, as they attract tourists, which often promotes economic activity. Economic value cannot only be measured objectively but is also seen as a product of the cultural meaning and social relationships that shape economic exchange. By understanding these social and cultural contexts, we can gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the church's economic value. Economic value has also been described thoroughly in the literature. William Lipe, a historian, views the economic value of a site as the study of historical and cultural materials as a resource in today's world.\(^3\) His view relies heavily on the idea that the socio-cultural dimension drives economic opportunity on a site. According to Lipe, the economic value is not just the working "gain" from a resource but how that gain shapes the social and cultural context within which the site exists.\(^3\) For example, what was worth millions of dollars centuries ago can now be worth nothing. The

\(^{30}\) Mason. 11.
\(^{31}\) Mason. 13.
\(^{32}\) Lipe, *Value and Meaning in Cultural Resources*. 9.
\(^{33}\) Lipe. 9.
opposite may also be true: what was worth nothing centuries ago could very well be worth millions today. What drives this change is the shift in value attributed to the object, whether religious, cultural, historical, etc., by its stakeholders.

Lipe also emphasizes the importance of reciprocity in economic exchange. Historically, economic exchange was not just transactions between individuals. Rather, there were social and cultural implications in each of these exchanges. For example, these exchanges may have helped create a sense of comfort and alliance between people and communities.\textsuperscript{34} At the White Monastery, revenue is allocated for different purposes on site. However, some of it is distributed back to the community to help sustain its members. These economic exchanges are indeed transactions, but they are emotionally or ethically motivated. These cultural behaviors and social relationships help shape economic exchange.

Mason defines economic value as the site’s financial gain, including economic revenue from tourism. Heritage plays a prominent role in economic promotion as it draws in tourists and media attention, leading to economic gain for both the specific site and its community. For the White Monastery, tourists invest their money in preserving the historic church through purchases of goods or simple donations. Like Lipe, Mason notes that the economic value is often tied with cultural, social, and historical significance, highlighting that the site’s authenticity and integrity bring people in, making the investment of time and money more appealing.\textsuperscript{35} For the case of this site, religious significance also plays a significant role in economic involvement of community

\textsuperscript{34} Lipe. 9.
\textsuperscript{35} Lipe. 9.
members, as those who attribute religious value to the site are likely more inclined to invest in its maintenance.
Chapter 4: Stakeholders and Values in the White Monastery Historic Church

To understand the concept of value assessment, we must first define what and who stakeholders are. Stakeholders are the various groups of individuals engaged with a site, whether through active usage, study, or visitation. Stakeholders are not just financial or labor contributors to the monastery, but people who give and take from it in their own way. This contribution can be monetary, emotional, physical, spiritual, or social. The currency of each stakeholder reflects the value they attribute to the monastery. These values reveal the stakeholders' motivation to engage with the site. In this case, these value attributions drive decision-making in the site’s preservation.

I will examine four stakeholders and analyze their overlapping values. The stakeholders of interest include monks, visitors, government inspectors, and international organizations. These stakeholders make up the land and have values that navigate how matters are run on the site. Each of these groups has, to some varying degree, an interest in the historic church's religious, historical, socio-cultural, and economic value. While each stakeholder may have a driving value, such as the primary religious interest of monks for example, it is impossible to completely isolate each value as a discrete category since many forces that drive one value may also drive them all. For example, a significant historical context is needed to understand the socio-cultural and economic role of the monastery within the community. In this thesis, I will attempt to outline and define the complex roles that each of these values play relative to the stakeholders, with the understanding that they are primarily related and codependent.
The monks, who inhabit and invigorate the monastery, are primarily invested in the religious and socio-cultural value of the space. However, their roles within monastic life are deeply rooted in historical Coptic tradition, and their relationship with the greater community provides a degree of economic support.

Visitors of the historic church can be divided into two main categories: those who are pursuing religious retreat and those with an interest in the monastery’s historical significance from a tourism standpoint. Regardless of their purpose, both groups bring economic value to the community, and their interaction with monastic life has socio-cultural implications. The site’s religious and non-religious visitors are one of the primary sources of revenue for the functioning and outreach of the monastic community. It sustains tangible elements of the historic church, its daily necessities, and donations towards the greater community where it is positioned.

International organizations of archeologists, preservationists, historians, Egyptologists, independent graduate students, and other researchers are primarily invested in the historical and socio-cultural value of the site. The main purposes of these research projects at the historic church are to invest in its physical structure, assess the implications of its role within religious and nonreligious communities, and build a skill set through study.

Government inspectors are uniquely positioned as secular stewards of this site, incentivized by the socio-cultural and economic value it brings to the community and the government. The inspectors depend on the work that the preserving a site like this provides. Their salaries are low, but are supplemented by the daily fees incurred by projects as such. Moreover, external pressures on the government from influential
Copts have increased the inspectors’ socio-cultural awareness of the importance of preserving this Coptic heritage site.

When looking at the stakeholders listed above, they attribute different values to the site. This refers to the significance or importance of a heritage asset, such as a building, site, or artifact. Values are assigned based on various criteria that help identify their essence. Identifying and understanding the values of a cultural resource is crucial in making decisions about its preservation, preservation, and management. It helps ensure that resources are protected in ways that maintain their significance and integrity while allowing for appropriate use and interpretation by future generations. We will examine four values: religious, historical, socio-cultural, and economic. Due to the complexity of the overlapping values and stakeholders, this value assessment will be broken down by stakeholder.

4.1: Monks' Value Attributions

The predominant use of the historic church is for worship. Coptic Orthodox monks inhabit the historic church, and thereby have the most intimate relationship with the site and a crucial perspective into the importance of its preservation. As monks, their interactions with the site are driven by religious values. Dedicating one's life to God by living in obedience, poverty, and chastity, is a religious choice. All those that follow are steeped in religious consciousness. They are "dead" to the world as they live a life revolving around praising, preaching, and serving God. Monks pray and partake in all the religious practices on the site continuously to obtain these goals. They are the ones that lead and coordinate the religious activities and enrichment on the site. For example, depending on their ordination rank, they lead liturgies, take confessions, plan and teach
classes, and lead prayers. These religious activities and practices happen both in the historic church and on its land. This includes serving in other churches, the outdoor cafeteria, and other parts of the property. Many monks live in a constant state of prayer, so the entire property is a potential space that may incur religious value. Furthermore, because monks are not limited to just praying in the historic building, they have the freedom and choice to pray anywhere on the land unless told otherwise. Some monks pray in the newer church, while others pray in the historic church. This reflects their historical value since the space still provides the same religious benefit, yet just in the ancient building.

Figure 5. Edited version of Monneret de Villard’s reconstructed plan of the White Monastery church. After U. Monneret de Villard, Les couvents près de Sohâg (Deyr el-Abiad et Deyr el-Ahmar), Volume 1, Milan: Tipografia Pontificia e Arcivescovile S. Giuseppe, 1925, pl. 3. Showing Religious Value lands on the site in the nave, sanctuary and baptismry room. (edited by Damiana Yousef, 2022)
Figure 5 highlights the areas of the historic church that carry primarily religious value. In context, it depicts a map of where monks worship or practice the formal rites of the Coptic Church. The red highlighted area includes consecrated sites such as the altar, baptistry, and nave. The nave is where the congregation can gather and pray as the monks lead the liturgical services. The monks also have a secondary socio-cultural relationship with the site, as some interact with visitors and other monks. Although monks are known for complete solitude and prayer in a monistic lifestyle, many are called to serve onsite. Serving does not just apply to religious practices such as sacramental actions, but also to social interactions. The monks willingly want to communicate, interact and pray for and with the site’s visitors.

This interaction comes from doing simple things like talking, eating together at the cafeteria, and participating in fun activities on the site, such as playing sports with...
the kids. Being physically involved and sharing these moments with the community is a part of their daily life, reflecting the socio-cultural value that these monks, as well as the visitors that come on the site, have. Also, the act of praying together is a form of socio-cultural value. Since these monks participate in and lead religious services, including prayers, the people who come to practice these religious beliefs share these moments with the monks. Prayer is personal, and each individual does it on their own. However, being surrounded by others participating in the same practice expresses socio-cultural value. In Figure 7, the areas in which these social interactions may occur are highlighted on an architectural drawing. Images are in Figures 9, 10, 11, and 15. These areas include the walkway space between the entrance to the historic church and the entrance to the nave of the church (Figure 9), the bookstore located on the east corner of the building (Figure 10), and small openings in the historic church on the northeast side where there is imagery talking about the history of the building displayed (Figure 11). Figure 15 shows this fellowship in prayer as the monk leads a liturgical prayer with a congregation.
Figure 7. Edited version of Monneret de Villard's reconstructed plan of the White Monastery church. After U. Monneret de Villard, Les couvents près de Sohâq (Deyr el-Abiad et Deyr el-Aḥmar), Volume 1, Milan: Tipografia Pontificia e Arcivescovile S. Giuseppe, 1925, pl. 3. Showing Socio-cultural Value in the walkway, book store, nave, and small sectioned rooms on the site (edited by Damiana Yousef, 2022)

Figure 8. Edited version of Monneret de Villard's reconstructed plan of the White Monastery church. After U. Monneret de Villard, Les couvents près de Sohâq (Deyr el-Abiad et Deyr el-Aḥmar), Volume 1, Milan: Tipografia Pontificia e Arcivescovile S. Giuseppe, 1925, pl. 3. Showing Economic Value in the bookstore and against the east facing call in the walkways area on the site (edited by Damiana Yousef, 2022)
In order to understand the competing religious and historical values that a monk may carry, assessing the route to ordination is essential. Once a monk is ordained, he chooses which monastery he would like to be consecrated in. Then the bishop of that monastery chooses to accept or deny him.\textsuperscript{36} This is very personal, and the rationale can vary. The choice predominantly relates to the monks’ relationship with a patron saint and hopes to be in his namesake’s church. The White Monastery is named for St. Shenoute, the Amorite. Some monks chose to be ordained to the White Monastery due to their spiritual relationship with St. Shenoute alone. Because saints are both religious and historical figures, this process also engages the historical value of the monk. Their choice of the monastery is personal and reflective of their identity, so the ordination process becomes a socio-cultural act. When a monk chooses where to settle permanently, their spiritual and personal identity becomes embroidered within the site and the associated saint. Their name changes and is hyphenated with the monastery’s name. For example, the head monk of the monastery is named Fr. Athanasius al-Shenouti. This process of name hyphenation is applied to all the monks on the site. In this case, religious, historical, and socio-cultural values are reflected in the ordination tradition. To put on this new identity and make this life-altering choice, they must weigh these three values carefully.

\textsuperscript{36} Saroufeem, Intweview with Fr. Gregory Saroufeem.
After the ordination, the monks’ lifestyle will drastically change. It will consist of a regimented routine emphasizing discipline and self-denial, including prayer and physical labor. At the historic church physical labor efforts include maintaining and cleaning the building. These acts may reflect historical value to a monk. It is also important to note that the monks willingly choose to keep the entirety of the building maintained. For example, in a building where only a small section is being actively used, the monks have the choice to leave the rest of the space in ruins, just like the other excavations on the site. However, they value the entirety of the building enough to keep up with its continual maintenance.

Although monks do not directly benefit financially from the monastery’s revenue, this group of stakeholders still has a significant economic value. The monastery’s
revenue is used, at least in part, to support and sustain the monks’ modest lifestyle. Revenue is provided by other stakeholders in the monastery, namely the visitors, who purchase food, gift store items, and furniture from the site, as illustrated in Figure 15. The monks can also tap into the economic value of the monastery in service of their other values. For example, a portion of the monastery's revenue is allocated for repairing and restoring the historic church building. Individual monks do not necessarily dictate where the money is allocated. Those who do allocate the money, the bishop and head monks, are in tune with the overall needs of the monks.

Moreover, the sale of goods is an economic avenue for the historic church. Additionally, it serves visitors who partake of these goods when touring the site. Both monks and locals produce goods sold by the monastery. The site is a trusted vendor in the community, providing members with essential goods and positioning itself as an object of socio-cultural value. The economic assets of the site are reinvested in the maintenance of religious traditions. For example, monks rely on economic productivity to purchase necessary religious garbs such as vestments, materials such as Bibles and Psalmody books, and ceremonial objects such as censers. Moreover, monks reinvest the remaining funds into impoverished communities, ensuring that they maintain an essential tenet of their vows: poverty. Giving is a religious value and an act central to their socio-cultural identity and sworn role within the greater monastic society.
4.2: Visitor's Value Attributions

A monastery is not just a place where monks live in isolation; monasteries are open to all visitors for religious worship, intellectual inquiry, and socialization. Predominant among the motivations for visitation is worship. Visitors come from all over Egypt and globally to receive a spiritual blessing. Religious visitors to the site practice many of the customs and traditions of the church rites, including taking off their shoes before entering, crossing themselves with their right hand, and using the space for prayer and meditation. Like the monks, Figure 5 highlights the consecrated worship areas where many of these traditions occur. These acts of respect and tradition result
from religious and socio-cultural values, as these customs reflect individual belief systems.

Figure 11. Image of the small openings in the church on the northeast side where historical imagery is displayed. 2022 (Photo taken by Damiana Yousef)

Visitors come specifically to this monastery during St. Shenoute’s feast. It is ubiquitous for people to pray at the consecrated church named after the saint whose feast is being celebrated. This could be due to the saint’s spiritual significance or the person’s interest in the history and tradition of the site. In Figure 12, the procession in the historic church’s courtyard during the feast of St. Shenoute is depicted. The ability to
celebrate the feast at St. Shenoute's namesake monastery sheds light on the site's historical value.

Without preservation, there would exist a gap in the collective memory of Copts. Naturally, when things are not preserved, traditions, ideas, stories etc. are forgotten and lost as time goes on. To maintain these memories they must be taught and practiced. Preserving tangible objects, like the historic church building, connects these memories and practices, keeping these ideas and traditions alive. As shown in Figure 6, the entire physical structure can be related to the history of its feast. Community gathering during religious events such as this feast for prayer and socializing reflects the socio-cultural importance of the space. Within American culture, this is similar to, for example, visiting Ground Zero during a 9/11 Memorial. People gather in a place where historic events transpire to remember their significance. Visitors come to the monastery because they have deep emotional ties to collective memories that form their group's identity. These annual festivities and other daily practices in the White Monastery provide an opportunity for both monks and visitors to create new memories while maintaining their traditions. In this way, using the space for the annual celebration is both a religious and socio-cultural act.
As mentioned, this monastery is located in Upper Egypt, approximately 6 hours from Cairo. Visitors have the choice of many monasteries all over Egypt, yet, they specifically choose this monastery. While some may come because it is convenient for them to pray, most visitors are motivated primarily by their desire to see one of the oldest monasteries in Egypt's history. The fact that visitors travel from far and wide further illustrates the historical value of this site.
This monastery provides a space for prayer and socializing for both monks and visitors. These gatherings encompass social and cultural meaning because they provide comfort and create unity. This space also allows for not only social activities such as eating (this happens outside of the historic church, yet still occurs on the monastery's property, see Figure 13) and fellowship, but also the opportunity to partake in praying together (this happens inside and outside of the building, see Figures 16 & 7 for locations). As far as social encounters in the building, we can see these displayed in Figure 7. These areas include the walkway space between the entrance to the historic church and the entrance to the nave of the church (Figure 9), the bookstore located on the east corner of the building (Figure 10), and small openings in the historic church on the northeast side where there is imagery talking about the history of the building displayed (Figures 11). Socio-culture value is also shown through visitors' donations to the monastery. Donating money or goods can express their attachment to and care for
the site. These donations help keep the monastery going for other values, such as historical and religious. Although you can usually specify where your donation gets used, most of the time these donations are just collected and distributed depending on the monastery's needs and values at the time.

A significant value that these visitors benefit from is the economic value they gain. The monastery is in an impoverished area where families struggle to sustain a reasonable and humane lifestyle. Inflation in Egypt is at an all-time high, and prices for goods are irrationally skyrocketing. It becomes challenging for these communities to get money for necessities such as food, clothes, and shelter. The monastery helps by allocating its financial resources to those who are in need. It provides care for over 500 families a year. Not only does the monastery donate money, but also clothes, food, shelter, and furniture. Furniture is heavily subsidized, and usually sold at cost. The monastery also provides jobs for members of the community, including making and selling food, working in the warehouse, and assisting at the historic church's gate. (Figure 19)
Figure 14. Sold goods inside the historic church at the White Monastery in the walkway area. 2022 (Photo taken by Damiana Yousef)
4.3: International Organization's Value Attributions

The people working hands-on with the site become essential stakeholders in the White Monastery. These groups are international organizations. Like government inspectors, the organizations involved will uphold different values depending on their
particular interaction with the site. Some international organization members may be doing work for personal research, so they do not get additional funds from the site. Others may be freelance workers who receive a daily wage to be on the site. All have different reasoning and value, which means the specific place of interest on the land can vary.

The values and drive for the international players to work onsite become very internal and personal. This is due to the historical and socio-cultural values each person may have. These stakeholders engage with others, so their interactions and involvement drive their values. Being a foreigner in a country is restraining, especially in a highly religious country and site. In Egypt, you can either identify as Christian or Muslim. This rule becomes problematic when an international player who does not fall under these two categories wants to work onsite. This is frustrating as visitors are prohibited from staying onsite due to religious tension. That in itself can sway a value.

These international organizations dealing with government officials at both the local and national levels can be tricky. For example, there was an incident where a plan was in place regarding a site restoration. Engineers, professionals, and researchers checked this plan, but it was declined due to a misunderstanding when they circled back to the national level. This becomes frustrating, and the transaction can reduce the site's value.

These international organizations' values bring enough interest to start getting involved with site preservation. In project discussions with governmental officials, they decide what, when, and how aspects of the historic church gets preserved.

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37 Davis, Interview with Stephen Davis.
38 Davis.
4.4: Government Inspector's Value Attributions

There is a need for preservation on this site because it is an important heritage site within Coptic culture. Preservation efforts begin and progress through the action taken by governmental inspectors involved on the site. In Egypt, specifically with the historic church at the White Monastery, a site is assigned to a local inspector who answers to a regional office who then answers to a national office. This national office is a part of the Coptic and Islamic Antiquities within the broader tourism ministry.\(^{39}\) Within this hierarchy, local inspectors do not have much agency or power as the higher offices control the ultimate direction of the projects and grant decisions. The local inspectors must implement whatever they are asked to do by their superiors. However, when dealt with on the ground, these local inspectors hold more agency in conversation with other prominent stakeholders, such as monks and international organizations.\(^{40}\) These conversations can become problematic as stakeholders must speak with the local inspectors to seek authorization for any preservation efforts they want to implement. Inspectors usually remain strictly within the limits of authorization that were given to them from the hierarchy and cannot offer much flexibility. Frequently, inspectors do not come equipped with the necessary knowledge regarding preservation while others view the site with genuine disinterest.\(^{41}\) Moreover, many of the inspectors value their job security over any preservation effort. With that, when these local inspectors go on site, they have to pay for their transportation to get there which cuts a large chunk of their salaries. This ultimately means there is a disincentive to be on the site regularly,

\(^{39}\) Davis.
\(^{40}\) Davis.
\(^{41}\) Davis.
especially if it is far.\textsuperscript{42} Just seeing the surface of how governmental inspectors work, we can see that many of their values are economically driven. Therefore, preservation efforts vary by location depending on the highest governmental authorities' agreement.\textsuperscript{43}

It is also important to note that the inspector's job is not easy. Inspectors must address tensions among the stakeholders with little authority to resolve them. From the perspective of someone who is not an inspector, they are seen as the person who makes all the calls and has the authority to authorize anything they see fit, when that is not the case. This can lead to ambiguous reasoning and poor guidance, affecting the work and how inspectors navigate their involvement.\textsuperscript{44} For example, upon research, an article was found about how government inspectors ignored and neglected the historic church at the White Monastery, which led to one of the walls of the building falling.\textsuperscript{45} A few allegations were made about the reasoning behind the wall collapsing as it being a religious discrimination case against the site. Due to the history of religious tension in Egypt, this became a believable theory to the public eye. Public opinions and the spread of misleading information complicated the situation. Inspectors with little control over the situation were now dealing with false allegations. Frustrating circumstances like these can affect the inspectors' workflow onsite as they become more timid and angry as these unjust things are said about them. Knowing that their livelihood depends on their low salary, dealing with this can become disheartening and make them less inclined to make the work atmosphere uplifting.\textsuperscript{46}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{42} Davis.  \\
\textsuperscript{43} Davis.  \\
\textsuperscript{44} Davis.  \\
\textsuperscript{45} “COLLAPSE OF PART OF THE WALLS OF THE WHITE MONASTERY IN SOHAG, UPPER EGYPT.”  \\
\textsuperscript{46} Davis, Interview with Stephen Davis.
\end{flushright}
With that, there becomes this entanglement engagement of values. When these stakeholders are together (monks, inspectors, and even international organizations), everyone treats each other with a front-facing formality. Behind closed doors, some of these stakeholders criticize each other. Consequently, tension is always present as this social dance of formality and respect displays incredulity.\(^ {47}\) This matters because the ties these stakeholders associate with each other have much to do with their values. For example, if monks get frustrated, the inspectors may not take this frustration well as it becomes personal. This then comes off as culturally backward in some sense. Also, religious tension in the country gets tied into apathy and immobility. This social dance reflects a long-standing cultural resentment the Coptic community may hold against the larger Muslim population. Instead of economic or religious, these values are shot through all parties.\(^ {48}\)

As we see, governmental inspectors go through a variety of crises. They face low wages and pressures from authorities, researchers, monks, and other stakeholders involved with the work onsite. All of these factors directly affect the whole site in preservation. Whatever physical preservation happens on the site happens because it is allowed by these inspectors. When inspectors with a more robust educational background are onsite, things tend to go smoothly. Still, with external pressures, the site's preservation is strictly followed by government officials' orders. The same concept goes with inspectors who feel treated poorly or unfairly. Preservation efforts can be slowed down or affected as they give the final approval on actions.

\(^ {47}\) Davis.
\(^ {48}\) Davis.
Chapter 5: A History of the Preservation of the The White Monastery Historic Church

5.1: Origins of the White Monastery

Archeological findings in the region where the monastery stands predate the Pharaonic period (3100-32 B.C.), suggesting that the first settlements in the region occurred during the Neolithic period (6000-3200 B.C.). Although scholars cannot confidently date the monastery itself, the materials of the building date back to the Pharaonic period. For this reason, the limestone blocks used to construct the historic church is understood to be the remains of old ruins found along the Nile, suggesting that the historic church was constructed using materials from a temple dedicated to the Egyptian god, Horus. A researcher named Daniel Klotz has identified the origin of the blocks as various pagan ruins, including the temple of Repyt. Experienced Coptic scholar Hany Takla, who has edited multiple publications on the White Monastery, notes that researchers have found pagan iconography on the historic church's building blocks. However, when used in the historic church, the blocks were either positioned such that the faces containing this imagery were hidden, or the imagery was painted over.

49 McNally and Schrunk, Excavations in Akhmim, Egypt: Continuity and Change in City Life from Late Antiquity to the Present. 1
50 Kees, Kulttopographische Und Mythologische Beiträge: Zeitschrift Für Ägyptische Sprache Und Altertumskunde; Klotz, Triphis in the White Monastery: Reused Temple Blocks from Sohag; Blanke, An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism. 199.
51 Klotz, Triphis in the White Monastery: Reused Temple Blocks from Sohag; Blanke, An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism. 199.
52 Takla, Interview with Hany Tekla.
53 Davis, Interview with Stephen Davis.
The White Monastery was founded in the fifth century by Apa Pegol. He went on to serve as its first abbot. Apa Pegol's nephew, St. Shenoute, would later succeed his uncle as abbot. St. Shenoute studied under his uncle's tutelage for years and became well-versed in his monastic practices. St. Shenoute's zeal for monastic life has been impactful on the monastery and has endured till this day. Under his leadership, the monastery grew and engaged readily with the surrounding community. His vision of monastic life focused on serving others and his mission facilitated the creation of the welcoming space with which visitors are familiar today.54

St. Shenoute's writings express the importance of the community and the need for a space that they can consider a second home. Bentley Layton, Professor of Religious Studies at Yale University, studied St. Shenoute's writings and highlighted the following communal spaces within the historic church, "monastic sleeping quarters, a central refectory for monks, a kitchen with a communal area, an infirmary that housed ill monks a separate kitchen, important storage space called Diakonia, a library and a house."55 These areas reflect St. Shenoute's belief that the monastery should contain common spaces in service of the community, intended for everyday use.

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54 Gabra and Takla, “Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt; v.1.” 74.
5.2: History of Preservation and Value Assessment of the Historic Church

The solid-standing limestone church cannot be exactly dated but was built at some point between the late antiquities and the early medieval period. It was, and still is, a thriving and influential monastic foundation.\textsuperscript{56} Although it still functions as a communal place for prayer and fellowship, the physical condition of the church structure has deteriorated. Evaluating the deterioration of the site over time is difficult for a few reasons. First, there is no comprehensive record of how the physical conditions of the church have evolved. We are lucky to have various fragments of sources that piece together the architectural deterioration and development of the church over time. These

\textsuperscript{56} Blanke, \textit{An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism}. 1.
include manuscripts from the tenth to the twelfth century, inscriptions from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the accounts of multiple travelers over several centuries.57

Figure 17. Drawing of the historical church, date unknown (Photo given by Fr. Athanasius al-Shenouti)

Documents from the eighth and ninth centuries, later compiled in the 11th century as "The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandra," offer good insight into the historic church from an outsider’s perspective.58 This collection contains accounts from al-Qasum ibn Ubaydallah, Egypt's financial director at the time. He visited the monastery during a period of heightened religious tension between Muslims and Christians in Egypt.59 Al-Qasum ibn Ubaydallah's description of the historic church mentions that "the western narthex gives access to a staircase which led to the galleries above the aisles of the nave."60 This is structural evidence suggesting the historic church was not yet in ruins in the 11th century. Moreover, around 1167 A.D., a visitor

57 Blanke. 38.
58 Blanke. 38.
59 Abu Salih the Armenian, The Churches & Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries. 238.
60 Blanke, An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism. 39.
named Abu al-Makarim described the historic church as spacious enough to hold thousands of people and an enclosed wall with a keep, surrounded by a garden filled with trees. \textsuperscript{61} There is also documentation from the year 1259 A.D. that details what seems to be one of the first restorations on the northeast area of the historic church; this effort was conducted following an earthquake. \textsuperscript{62} According to Louise Blanke, no surviving document states when exactly the earthquake took place or how much of the structure was damaged, though it can be assumed that it happened at some point between Abu al-Makarim's visits in the 12th century and 1259 A.D. restoration. \textsuperscript{63} It is also hard to say who was involved in recognizing the damage and the exact intentions that drove this preservation event. Considering that the preservation focused on the northeastern area near the sanctuary of the historic church, it is safe to assume that the religious value of the site motivated this restoration. \textsuperscript{64} This restoration event occurred over eight centuries after the historic church was first built, and it appears that the monks of 1259 A.D. were intent not only on maintaining the historic church's liturgical function, but also in preserving its historical value. Furthermore, at the time of the earthquake, this was the only altar within the monastery grounds, so it was of paramount religious importance to preserve its functionality. In later years however, as more historic churches cropped up throughout the monastery grounds, the motivation for preservation of the original limestone church may have shifted from primarily religious to historical.

\textsuperscript{61} Abu Salih the Armenian, \textit{The Churches & Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries}. 273.
\textsuperscript{62} Gabra and Takla, “Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt; v.1.” 137.
\textsuperscript{63} Blanke, \textit{An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism}. 43.
\textsuperscript{64} Blanke. 42
In the 16th century, a ciborium, which is a canopy that can be used to cover altars, thumbs, or pulpits, was built out of stones and fired brick within the nave in order to later shelter the pulpit. The pulpit is a raised platform located in the nave. It is understood that Ethiopian pilgrims who temporarily lived in the historic church built the ciborium in order to protect the pulpit from damage. The Ethiopian pilgrims, in this case, fall within the stakeholder category of "visitors." Their intention to preserve this pulpit, and prayer area, is primarily religiously driven. Although these were not acts of maintenance, they can still be considered acts of preservation since these small additions helped ensure the longevity and utility of the historic church. Another source details the construction of more "internal structures" within the nave during the same period. Although the intention behind the construction of these internal structures is not mentioned, it can be assumed with some confidence that they were used for domestic purposes, such as housing for clergy and visiting families, suggesting the influence of sociocultural value in these efforts.

About 100 years later, in 1673 A.D., Johann Vansleb, a theologian and traveler, visited the monastery to collect manuscripts and antiquities for the royal collections. Vansleb described the historic church as one of the most magnificent structures in Egypt with five to six doorways blocked and reduced to 'the size of a man' in the south wall. He reports that all the windows were walled up, and the interior was demolished, except the sanctuary. The roof of the nave had collapsed, but the pillars were still standing. This account emphasizes the focus of preservation efforts on the sanctuary,

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65 Blanke. 43.
66 Blanke. 42
67 Bierbrier, Who Was Who in Egyptology. 566.
68 Vansleb, The Present State of Egypt, or, A New Relation of a Late Voyage into That Kingdom Performed in the Years 1672 and 1673. 224.
rather than the whole historic church. According to Vansleb, the sanctuary is the only area in the historic church that is not demolished. In this way, it is evident that the maintenance of the sanctuary is prioritized, highlighting the influence of religious value in the preservation of religious value held by the monks and visitors who maintained it for liturgical purposes.

In the early nineteenth century, the southwest corner of the historic church collapsed. Because of the significant collapse, the community living inside the historic church was negatively impacted.  

According to Vansleb, the sanctuary is the only area in the historic church that is not demolished. In this way, it is evident that the maintenance of the sanctuary is prioritized, highlighting the influence of religious value in the preservation of religious value held by the monks and visitors who maintained it for liturgical purposes.

In the early nineteenth century, the southwest corner of the historic church collapsed. Because of the significant collapse, the community living inside the historic church was negatively impacted.  

Robert Curzon, an English traveler, who visited the historic church in 1833 for its well-known library, writes of an extensive rebuild. He described the historic church as in ruins, noting that livestock crowded the nave, likely impeding its use for liturgical services. He also mentioned how the monks repaired the historic church after attackers had gutted the interior. Blanke, in her book, referred to this encounter by Curzon and said that it is notable that the community was determined to rebuild the southwest corner of the historic church after it collapsed. She suggests the community must have had financial resources to do these restorations. Moreover, in 1847, Gardener Wilkinson, a British Egyptologist, mentioned that the historic church turned into a “Christian village” seeing that families had taken over the nave. Given Curzon’s mention of livestock, this is no surprise. It is important to note that, at this time, there was significant religious tension between Muslims and Coptic Christians in Egypt. Presumably, these families were utilizing the building as shelter to protect the historic

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70 Curzon, Visits to Monasteries in the Levant. 138-138.
71 Blanke, An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism. 47
church from Muslim invaders at the time.\textsuperscript{73} As the Copts were, and still are, a marginalized ethno-religious group in Egypt, the preservation of the southwest corner reflects a few different things. The first is the historical value of the historic church since the stakeholders were interested in preserving the historic church due to its reflection of Coptic heritage at a time of ethnic tension. This heritage value comprises the religious and cultural values of the Copts. The dominant Muslim invaders may have hoped to subdue the antithetical Coptic history, culture, and religion by destroying its physical manifestations of it (i.e., the historic church). Secondly, given that the monastic community had enough disposable funds to put towards the preservation efforts of this wall, one can safely assume that an extensive social network of Copts was interested in preserving the site - highlighting the sociocultural value of the historic church. Thirdly, as religious stakeholders, both monks and visitors were not willing to concede their Christian faith, they needed to maintain the physical integrity of the historic church to be safe and worship as Christians. Lastly, as mentioned, the monks and the community were raising livestock within the historic church. While it was unclear whether this livestock was used to create wealth for the community through trade, it can be assumed that it was at least utilized for their own benefit. In this way, maintaining a space to raise their livestock purported economic value in as much as they were not reliant on spending or trading for food. Moreover, in a time that was clearly socially tenuous due to impending invasions, it was important to maintain the ability to be self-reliant.

\textsuperscript{73} Murray and Wilkinson. 428-429
At the end of the 19th century, a Russian art historian and archaeologist named De Bock visited the monastery and did a complete architectural description. De Bock stated that the historic church was in ruins and that houses had been built among the ruins for priests, families, and farmers. He went on to say how these houses were probably the direct cause of the decaying of the original building, making it challenging to assess the historic church’s original structure. Similarly, another archeologist, George Clarke mentioned that a massive limestone block was surrounded by ruined

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brick. He also noted that hefty debris, mostly of bricks, surrounded the north, west, and south side of the building. Clark supported De Bock's observation that many people lived within the historic church's walls with their livestock and that the historic church's narthex had imploded.\footnote{Clarke, \textit{Christian Antiquities in the Nile Valley. A Contribution towards the Study of the Ancient Churches.} 149-150.} After his survey of the site, he repeatedly contacted the authorities responsible for Coptic and Islamic Antiquities in Egypt, reporting the historic church's conditions and demanding immediate action. Finally, in 1907, the authorities of Egypt's Coptic and Islamic Antiquities responded to the demand for the restoration of the historic church. The preservation of its sister monastery, the Red Monastery, was also a part of this plan.\footnote{Blanke, \textit{An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism.} 50.}

From 1902-1911, the historic church underwent a restoration that consisted of extensive cleaning and removal of debris. In a report to the Coptic and Islamic Antiquities in Egypt, Blanke states, "Walls were then taken down, blocks were recut, and then reassembled. Paint, plaster, and other encrustations were removed from the nave, and all but the two houses were cleared."\footnote{Blanke; Meurice, \textit{L'intervention Du Comité de Conservation Des Monuments de l'art Arabe Au Couvent Blanc de Sohag.} 50, 278.} After all these restorations took place, a third house was built in 1947 to accompany the two recently restored houses.\footnote{Meurice, \textit{L'intervention Du Comité de Conservation Des Monuments de l'art Arabe Au Couvent Blanc de Sohag.} 278}

Though the exact motivations behind preserving the two houses in the nave are unknown, we can assume that this action can also reflect the sociocultural value on this site in that maintaining shelter for priests and families was of great social importance. This architectural preservation also included consolidation of the outer walls, stairs, and
brickworks as well as cleaning, removing debris, and reassembling blocks to ensure the structural integrity of the building.

The historic church was cleared of all three houses in 1985 by the local department of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. In 1973, Pope Shenouda III, the 117th Coptic Orthodox Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Sea of St. Mark at that time, visited the White Monastery and its sister monastery, the Red Monastery, expressing his wishes to re-establish these monastic communities. It was not until 1997 that the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church officially reinstated the White Monastery.\textsuperscript{79} The reinstatement of the monastery should be considered an act of preservation. In this case, Pope Shenouda III’s decision to reinvest in the monastery is a testament to its value in the local community and to the broader Coptic Church.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure19.png}
\caption{Timeline developments of physical conditions on the historic church at the White Monastery, 2023 (Made by Damiana Yousef)}
\end{figure}

In the year 2000, the International Congress for Coptic Studies planned archaeological work in the White and Red Monastery, the sister monastery to the White Monastery within close proximity. Elizabeth Bolman led the efforts by gathering a group of scholars for preservation and research of the monasteries located in the region of Sohag, Upper Egypt.\textsuperscript{80} This large project consisted of multiple stages, the second and

\textsuperscript{79} Blanke, \textit{An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism}. 50-51
\textsuperscript{80} Davis, “Archaeology at the White Monastery, 2005-2010.” 28.
third stages focusing on the historic church at the White Monastery. In 2002 and 2003, the groundwork was laid for a series of surveys and an excavation was planned for 2005. These extensive studies were supported by organizations including the American Research Center in Egypt (ARC) and Simpson Endowment for Egyptology at Yale University.\textsuperscript{81} In 2008, the White Monastery Federation came under the administration of the executive director of Stephen J. Davis as part of the Yale Monastic Archaeology Project (YMAP). He oversaw preservation and excavation efforts at the White Monastery and several other monastic sites in Egypt.\textsuperscript{82} In January 2022, the north wall of the original church of the White Monastery collapsed, drawing much scrutiny, since the collapse of this wall had been predicted prior but intervention was delayed to the Covid-19 pandemic as well as pending grants and construction permits/approvals.\textsuperscript{83} Currently, YMAP is the lead international organization working on the restoration of the north wall of the historic church and restoration efforts are ongoing. As an international organization, YMAP is primarily interested in the historical value of the site. Archeologists are primarily driven by their intellectual interest in the history of the site and analysis of its physical remains.

\textsuperscript{81} Davis. 28.
\textsuperscript{82} Davis. 29.
\textsuperscript{83} Davis, Interview with Stephen Davis.
Figure 20. Old photo of historic church at the White Monastery with a view of the two houses built inside, around 1900 (Photo given by Fr. Athanasius al-Shenouti)
Chapter 6: Conclusion

A comprehensive value-based assessment is critical in informing preservation efforts, communicating to preservationists what on a given site is worth preserving and why. As part of this assessment, this study identifies four stakeholders who engage most with the site (monks, visitors, governmental inspectors, and international organizations), and discusses the values which they attribute to the monastery, using a framework of four values: religious, historic, social-culture, and economic.

As discussed in this thesis, the study of preservation of the White Monastery overtime gives us an understanding of what parts of the site have been preserved, why the preservation efforts happened, who the stakeholders involved are and what values they attribute to the areas of the historic church that have been preserved and restored. From this understanding, we can make conclusions regarding which values, and which stakeholders, have historically had the most influence in guiding preservation and restoration efforts. Seeing how these values have influenced preservation historically, we can make recommendations regarding future preservation efforts, and which areas of the site should be prioritized, keeping the best interest of the aforementioned stakeholders in mind.

In the first documented restoration efforts on the historic church in 1259 A.D., we see that stakeholders (primarily the monks in this case) prioritize the restoration of the northeastern area of the historic church, near the sanctuary where liturgical services took place, leading us to believe that the efforts were motivated primarily by religious value. Later in the 16th century, we see that a ciborium was built to provide shelter for
the pulpit located in the nave. The addition of a structure intended to preserve the existing pulpit is another act of preservation, presumably motivated by religious value. Later again in the 17th century, we see that the entirety of the historic church was demolished with the exception of only the sanctuary, on which liturgical services were performed. Again, this is evidence that religious value primarily influences decisions/prioritization in the context of preservation. Finally, the more recent development of new churches within the monastery, redistributing the burden of services away from the historic church, highlights the influence of historical value on preservation.

Considering these preservation events, we see that they are often driven by stakeholders’ religious values, and that areas of great religious value on the site are best maintained. Therefore, it’s of the utmost importance that future preservation efforts place great weight on the stakeholders’ religious value associated with the historic church, allowing this value to guide preservation efforts. Specifically, I would recommend that modern preservation efforts always first consider the historic church, and the sanctuary therein. Historically, the preservation of the sanctuary has been prioritized above all else, and the religious and historic value of the sanctuary and historic church as a whole cannot be overstated. It is both a long-standing artifact of Coptic heritage and a site of liturgical celebration. When speaking with the monks of the monastery, an ultimate dream of theirs is to fully restore the whole historic church to its original state in the 5th century. This would of course be a substantial project, so my recommendation is to prioritize the structural preservation of the historic church over
cosmetic preservation, as the latter is key to maintaining the historic church’s functionality.

Moreover, the economic value of food production within today’s historic church is still very important. While in the 19th century, livestock was raised in the historic church, today the monks harvest produce which they use to both feed themselves and to sell to the surrounding community. Therefore, it is also of great importance to preserve the lands used for crops, and other economic exchanges, since the monastery’s economic productivity is critical not only for the livelihood of the monks, but also for the wellbeing of the larger community.

The value assessment conducted in this thesis, culminating in the guiding recommendations above, should be used by preservationists to inform future preservation and restoration efforts in the historic church at the White Monastery. Even equipped with this assessment, preservationists ought to engage with stakeholders, as I have done briefly in this study, to ensure that efforts are guided by an up-to-date understanding of the White Monastery’s stakeholders and their values.
1. White Monastery
2. Anba Wisa Church
3. St. Mary Church
4. Open Court Yard
5. Apartments
6. Housing for Tourist (gov ran)
7. Warehouse for Furniture
8. Doctor’s office
9. Generators
10. Anba Karas Church
11. Excavations
12. Cemetery
13. Business Buildings
14. Farm for Animals
15. Agriculture
16. Monk Cemetery
17. Housing for Monks
18. Bishops Head Quarters
19. Church for Clergy
20. Free Land
21. Church in Cave
22. Hermit Cells
23. Water tanks
24. Super Market
25. Water from Land connection
26. Church for Monks
27. Food Place for Monks
28. House for Solitude Monks
29. Governmental Office

Figure 21.1. Map survey of the White Monastery with newer development, 2022(made by Damiana Yousef)
Figure 21.2. Continuation of map survey of the White Monastery with newer development (made by Damiana Yousef)
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