

preservation of them was manifestly due to their having slid down at a time when sufficient débris from the vaulting had already accumulated below to stop the fall of the gradually loosened fresco pieces. Thus in one place the dado was at first completely hidden behind three successive layers of frescoed stucco. It was reasonable to assume that the innermost piece was the first to be stopped in its fall, and thus to have originally belonged to the frieze nearest the dado.

To remove any of these pieces of painted stucco, some several feet large and all very brittle, was an exceedingly delicate task. The stucco backing consisted of nothing but very friable clay, mixed with short straw of cut reeds, but not sufficiently to give it coherence or elasticity. Nowhere did it show a thickness of more than half an inch. When touched without the greatest care it was apt to break away at the edges. There was a very thin facing of finer clay to receive the painting, but it had no admixture of fibres, as often found in later fresco backing, and its greater firmness seemed only to increase the liability to cracks when once removed from the wall surface. There was the risk, too, of losing sight of the connection between fragments which had fallen close together, and might form parts of the same composition. So it was essential to secure as exact a record as possible of the condition and place in which these superimposed fragments of fine wall painting were found before attempting their separation and rescue.

Detailed descriptive notes and photography were the means available; but both offered difficulties of their own. All day it was bitterly cold, and icy gusts from the north soon benumbed my hands as I kept crouching in cramped positions, busy with endless measuring and scribbling of pencilled notes. These had then in the evening to be worked out and transferred in ink to my diary under the shelter of my tent. Photographic work was scarcely less trying. The whole width of the circular passage was only four feet eight inches, and the consequent want of space necessitated extraordinary positions for the camera, and still more troublesome twistings for myself if a sufficiently