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Naqlun: Excavations, 1999

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NAQLUN

EXCAVATIONS, 1999

Włodzimierz Godlewski

The excavations carried out at Naqlun between September 6 and October 15, 1999, were a continuation of earlier work on the kom, which extends east of the modern-day monastery of Deir Malak Gubrail; investigations concentrated on the central part of the kom (sites A and E) and its northern edge (Site D).¹⁾ Concurrently with the explorations, team members continued studies of the previously uncovered material, now kept in storage at the site.²⁾ Christian Gaubert and Michel Mouton, of an archive of notarial Arab documents belonging to Georgi Bifam and his family;³⁾ Jacques Van der Vliet, of a set of Coptic texts discovered in 1993-1998 in the ruins of the monastic complex on site D; Iwona Zych, of the wooden objects, Maria Mossakowska, of the glass, Tomasz Górecki, of the pottery, and Barbara Czaja-Szewczak, of the textiles.

¹⁾ The Mission was directed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski and included: Prof. Michel Mouton (Sorbonne, Paris), Mr. Christian Gaubert (IFAO, Cairo), arabists; Dr. Jacques van der Vliet (University of Leiden), coptologist; Dr. Karol Piasecki, anthropologist; Mrs. Barbara Czaja-Szewczak, Mrs. Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert, Mrs. Iwona Zych, Mrs. Magdalena Żurek, archaeologists; Mr. Tomasz Górecki, ceramologist; Mr. Stanisław Machała, photographer; Messrs. Marek Puzzkarski and Mariusz Jucha kindly helped out with the documentation.

The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Mr. Ibrahim Ragab.

With the assistance of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, in Cairo as well as in Fayum, the fieldwork progressed smoothly and efficiently. The Mission is also grateful to the monks from the monastery of the Archangel Gabriel in Naqlun for their continued hospitality and generous assistance on many occasions.

²⁾ W. Godlewski, *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), 113-117; id., "Naqlun 1993-1996", in: *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und Christlicher Zeit*, ed. M. Krause (1999), 157-162.

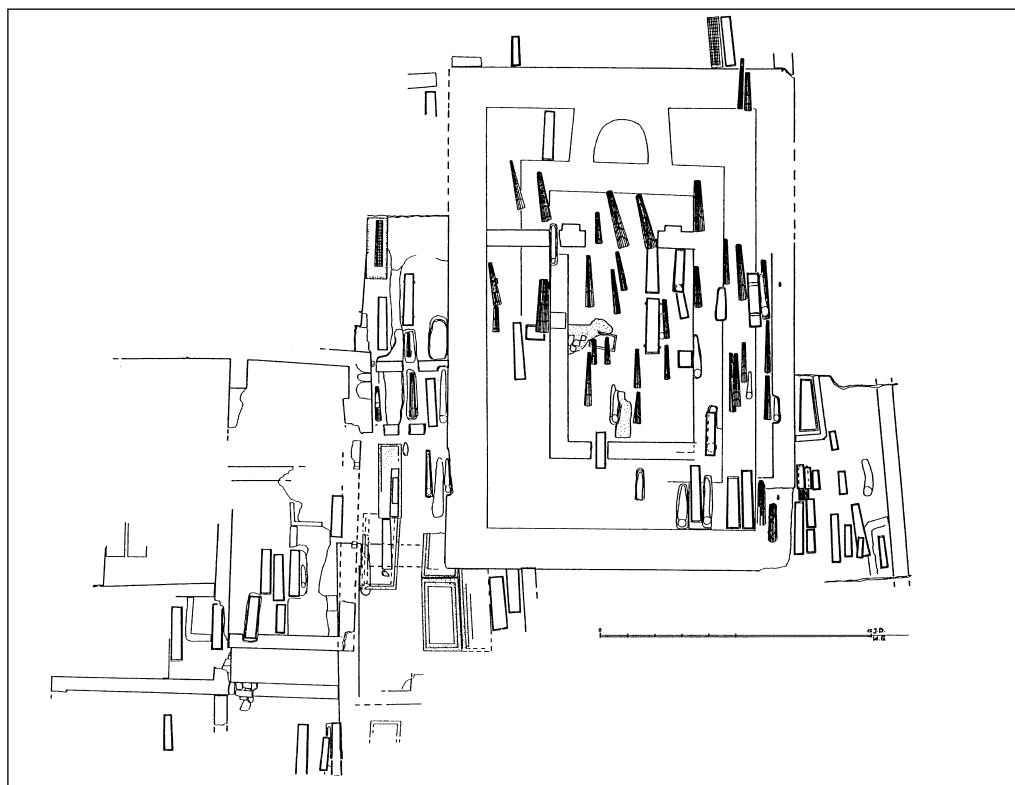
³⁾ Ch. Gaubert, "Remarques préliminaires sur les archives d'époque fatimide d'une famille copte", *PAM IX, Reports 1998* (1999), 87-89.

SITE A+E

The two trenches in the central part of the kom were connected this season, the major objectives being the exploration of a Coptic 19th-century cemetery and a study of tomb stratigraphy, including an investigation of the possible founding date of a burial ground that had developed around a Medieval church identified earlier on Site A. Also explored was the architecture lying north of the church, where an archive of Arab documents had been uncovered in 1997.

A total of 77 burials was investigated, mainly on the spot of the church and the

so-called northern street (Site A) that runs from east to west to the north of the church, and inside the architecture on Site E just to the north of the above-mentioned street. Together with the graves already excavated back in 1986 and again in 1998, that makes for a total of 130 investigated burials (*Fig. 1*);⁴⁾ on completion of the research, the skeletal remains were removed to a new burial crypt located in the area of the modern monastery. The continued existence of the cemetery in the 19th century had an adverse effect on the



*Fig. 1. Coptic cemetery on sites A and E
(Drawing W. Godlewski)*

⁴⁾ For a report on the Coptic cemetery, see the contribution by M. Źurek in this volume.

state of the older monastery ruins and it certainly limits today our chances for interpreting the archaeological layers, which are damaged considerably as a result of a concentration of grave pits.

Current research, however, has confirmed an observation made already in the 1998 season that the tombs in the northwestern corner of the church are much earlier than the other graves located in the ruins of the abandoned church and surrounding architecture. A total of five tombs was uncovered in the previous and current seasons (T. 50, T. 60, T. 63, T. 110, and T. 116), all connected with a church

still in use and located, with the exception of T. 116, in the northwestern corner of the structure. T. 116 is situated in the eastern end of the street and appears to be the latest of these burials. In its neighborhood there were two burials without any tomb structures, apparently earlier than T. 116. Neither are the remaining five tombs contemporary, considering that T. 110 is partly superimposed on the eastern end of T. 60, which was most certainly the older of the two, having a deeper trench and a coffin in incomparably worse condition. Of the discussed tombs only T. 60, T. 110 and T. 116 were opened.

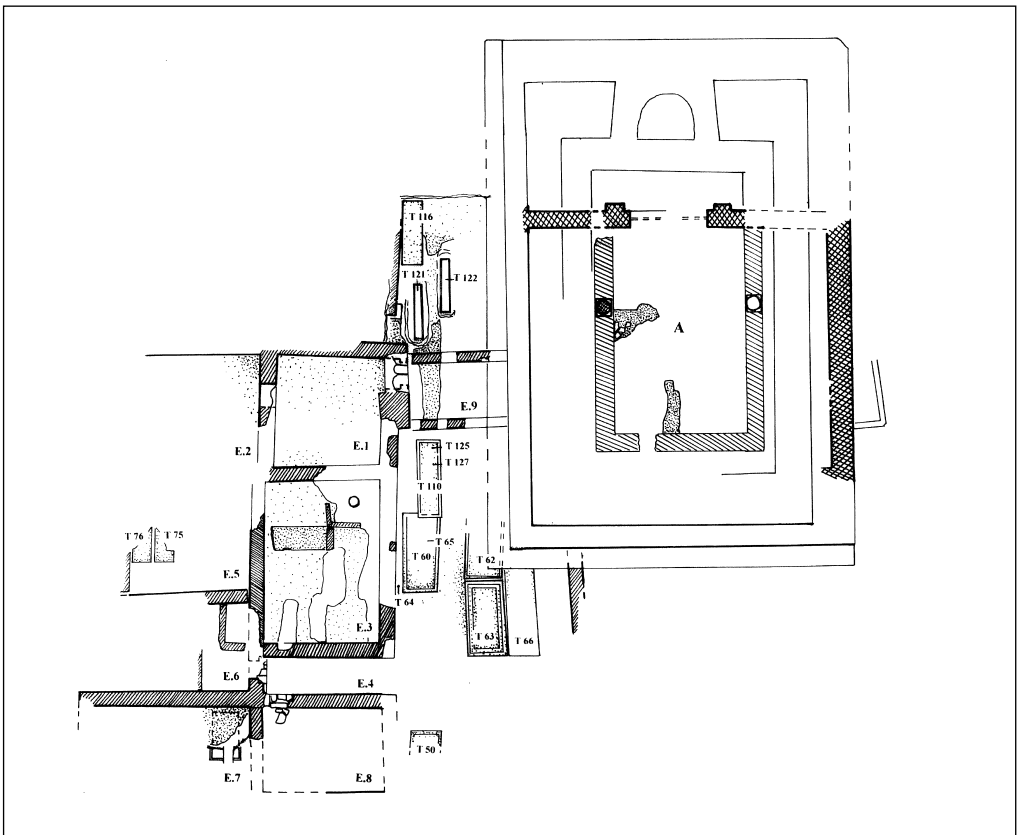


Fig. 2. Church A, Building E and the early cemetery
(Drawing W. Godlewski)

T. 110 is of special interest. It was 273 cm long and 88 cm wide, constructed of mudbrick and devoid of lime plastering that is characteristic of the other, earlier tombs with their elongated superstructure of semicircular section. In the earth pits under the burial monument there were two wooden coffins containing an adult and a child (110 and 127), as well as an infant in a partly preserved amphora⁵⁾ (*Fig. 2*). The tombs from the northwestern corner of the church are founded on a heavily damaged walking level that has been recorded next to them and in the passage between the church and Building E, as well as fur-

ther east by the southern wall of Building G. This level was undoubtedly connected with the occupation of Church A and Buildings E and G, the latter still very poorly identified. It lies on a thick layer of fill, consisting mostly of pottery dated provisionally by Aswan ceramics and a local painted ware to the 9th-10th centuries AD. The building of the church is also connected with this chronological horizon, as is the construction of the buildings to the north of it (E and G). The tomb monuments should be of relatively later date and were constructed probably all through the time that the church remained in use.

CHURCH A

Church A was partly uncovered in 1986,⁶⁾ but the work was interrupted before more than the eastern and southern parts could be investigated. The entire area of the structure was cleared in the present season. As already indicated, the inside of the church was fairly filled with 19th century burials, the trenches of which had pretty much destroyed the walking level. The previous identification of the structure as a three-aisled basilica with *hurus* and most probably a narthex on the west has now been confirmed. No traces of an apse have been preserved, but it is highly probable that the apse of an earlier foundation had been reused (*Fig. 3*). The church walls were constructed of a big mudbrick measuring 43 x 22 x 13 cm, originating without any doubt from Building A, a monastic tower. The outer walls used remnants of an earlier building, while the inner walls and column foundations were largely grounded on

a layer of fill inside the tower. No entrances into the church were discovered, but one such doorway had surely been located in the center of the northern wall, where a passage connecting Building E and the church was situated on top of the so-called northern street. The other entrance may have existed on the west, probably on the building axis. It is noteworthy that the floor level inside the church, recorded only in the nave, was c. 80 cm higher than the walking level outside the building to the north, on the so-called northern street. Two rows of columns, most probably two in each, separated the aisles. The base of the northeastern column has been preserved in place, as has been the mounting for the base of the southeastern column.

The preserved relics of the western *hurus* wall and the pilasters of the arcade between the *hurus* and nave have provided sufficient evidence for the conclusion that the *hurus*

⁵⁾ For a discussion of the well preserved garments from this and other burials, see the contribution by B. Czaja-Szewczak in this volume.

⁶⁾ W. Godlewski, T. Herbich, E. Wipszycka, "Deir el Naqlun (Nekloni), 1986-1987: First Preliminary Report", *Nubica I-II* (1990), 181-188.

was accessible from the nave alone, the doorway being closed with a wooden screen. The form of the pilasters suggests that the central part of the space, directly in front of the apse, could have been domed. Pieces of ceiling planks, sometimes covered with a simple painted decoration, found in the debris indicate that the church had a wooden roof and ceiling very much like that in the nave of the existing medieval sanctuary of the archangel Gabriel at Naqlun. The walls of the church, presumably the upper parts, were covered with murals; only insignificant traces of these have survived. The floor in the nave, preserved in a small fragment by the northern colonnade, was

made of limestone tiles in mud-mortar bedding. Many fragmentary tiles of this kind have been discovered in the fill here, as well as in the ruins of buildings contemporary with the church, located on Site D in the northern part of the kom.

Dating evidence for the abandonment or ruining of the church is very poor – a few pieces of glazed Mamluk ware from inside the church, apparently the latest, if the 19th century burials are disregarded. Unfortunately, the contextual evidence in their case is unclear and they could come from deposits disturbed by the functioning of the cemetery in this part of the kom.

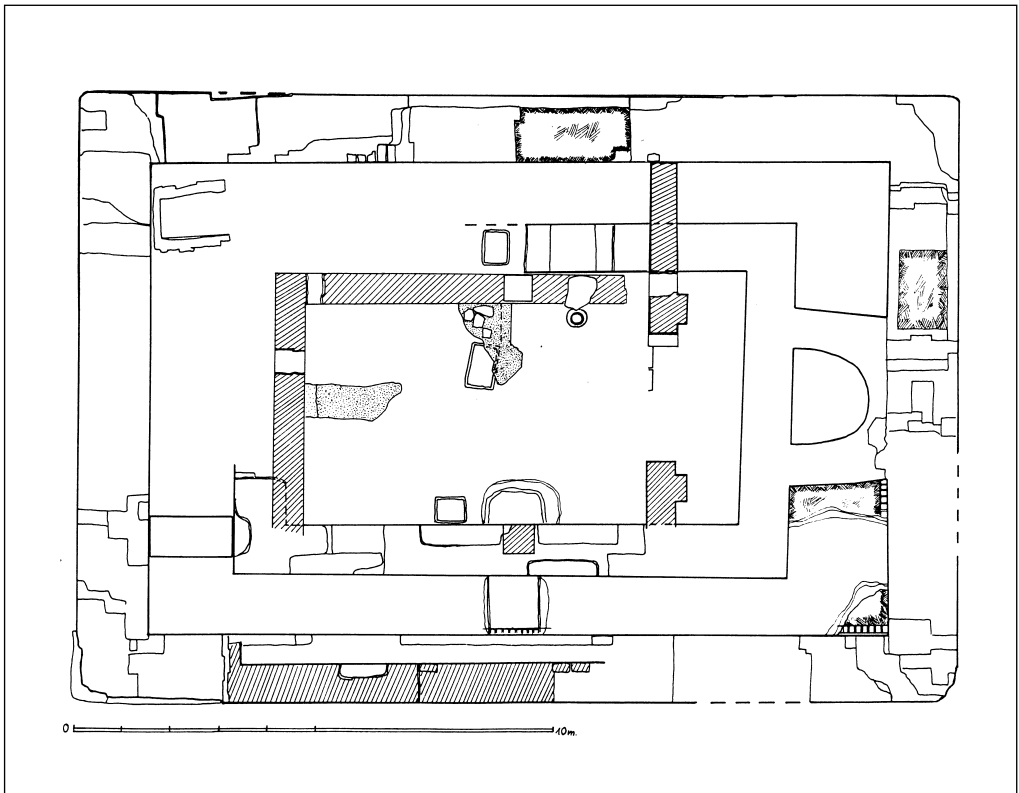


Fig. 3. Site A. Plan showing Building A and Church A
(Drawing W. Godlewski)

BUILDING A

Church A was erected on the ruins of an older structure that had been dismantled. This earlier building had been founded on bedrock that was not leveled in the process, hence the southern and southeastern walls are best preserved, having been situated in an obvious depression of the rock. The northwestern corner is only partly visible as the rock here was almost 100 cm higher than where the southeastern corner was situated. The plan of the structure had been identified correctly in the trial pits of 1986; the present work confirmed the dimensions – 18.5 x 13.0 m measured on the outside – and revealed that the outer walls had been covered with a lime plaster with bright polished surface. Pieces of plaster were observed on the western, northern and eastern facades. The massive walls (150 cm thick) leave no doubt as to its considerable height; it must have been a tower belonging to a complex, of which the northern and southern walls have been identified. These walls founded directly on bedrock may be interpreted as the outer walls of some kind of courtyard, c. 20.0 m wide, situated west of Building A. The central part of the kom may have been the location of an architectural complex resembling some of the hermitages at Kellia, such as QIsa 1, QIz 31; QIz 44,⁷⁾ or the hermitage of Epiphanius in Thebes.⁸⁾

Explorations are planned to extend to the western side of Building A in the coming season. No new material capable of assisting in the dating of Building A has come to light. In view of this the 6th century date for the founding of this structure remains highly probable.

To judge by the presence of three bins, two rectangular and one round, in the middle of the interior, some time must have elapsed between the destruction of Building A and the founding of the church. No dating material is in evidence.

On the outer surface of the enclosure walls of the tower complex clear traces of fire were observed along with ash deposits on the northern side. A golden denarius of the 10th century discovered in the ashes suggests a *post quem* date for the conflagration in this part of the monastic complex, which, to judge by the evidence of the south wall, presumably engulfed all the monastic buildings west of the tower A. The disaster exerted a strong influence on the further development of the Nekloni monastery, prompting the construction of monastic architecture in the area around the modern-day Church of the Archangel Gabriel, the compound on Site D and church A with the buildings (E and G) to its north.

BUILDING E

Building E was erected of small-sized mud-brick (220 x 110 x 55 mm) on top of the burnt ruins of earlier monastic architecture to the north of Church A, presumably contemporaneously with the church. Some of the surviving walls of an earlier structure

were reused in the new foundation, e.g. the northern wall in room E. 2. While the northern and western parts of Building E remain to be explored, it is already clear that it consisted of a number of interconnected rooms. It was accessible from the south

⁷⁾ G. Descoedres, Wohntürme in Klöstern und Ermitagen Ägyptens, in: Themelia. Spätantike und koptologische Studien Peter Grossmann zum 65. Geburtstag, ed. M. Krause, S. Schaten (Wiesbaden 1998), 69-79.

⁸⁾ H.E. Winlock, W.E. Crum, The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, I (New York 1926), 32-36.

through two entrances from the so-called northern street. The eastern door led to room E. 1 and was presumably the main passage between the structure and Church A. With time the passage was given lateral walls, forming in effect room E. 9. The western doorway led through a narrow corridor to room E. 6, as well as to rooms E. 8 and E. 7, which were more domestic in nature. Room E. 7 contained a small cellar with wooden roof, resembling the storage bins in the hermitages. As for E. 8, animals, presumably donkeys, were kept there for a time. Of all the rooms E. 3 is of the greatest interest, as it had a big "cupboard" with

walls one-brick-thickness in width, situated in the southeastern corner. Similar corner structures were recorded also in room E. 6 and in D. 22, but all the other ones were narrower than this one. In the floor of this "cupboard" in room E. 3 there was a storage jar that was found to contain the archive of one Girga ben Bifam - 50 Arab texts from the turn of the 10th century. A sort of mastaba was found next to the "cupboard"; it measured at least 185 x 85 cm and may have been used as a bed by the resident of the room, possibly the owner of the archive. The brick pavement in the northeastern corner of the room kept being raised.

SITE D

The western peripheries of the monastic compound were explored over the course of the season. In its developed stage, it was a storied building serving manifold purposes.

Workshops were located on the ground floor in the western part of the compound, including a book-binding atelier. Dwelling rooms with murals on the walls were found most



*Fig. 4. Complex D. Western end, room D. 32
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

probably on the upper floor; Coptic codices must have been available in these rooms, as several cards and covers were discovered in previous excavations seasons. The rooms D. 28, D. 30-D. 33, which started to be explored in 1998, are apparently domestic in nature. D. 32 turned out to be the most interesting (Fig. 4), being furnished with two domed ovens and a raised platform by the south wall, resembling a structure of unidentified function found in the previous season in room D. 29. A number of interesting objects discovered on the walking level of this room should be linked presumably with the last stage in the existence of the monastic complex on Site

D, some time at the turn of the 12th century. Beside some wooden products like a pendant cross (Fig. 5), comb, keys and parts of door locks, pottery turned out to be dominant in the share of objects. Especially noteworthy are some LR 7 amphorae that are thick-walled and sharply carinated at the point of junction of the neck and body. The vessels testify to the longevity of these storage containers used as wine packaging. Other pottery shapes present in the assemblage include vases, bottles, strainers, lamps and fragments of plates with bowl-like depressions (Fig. 6-8). A similar repertoire of forms was present in room D. 3,⁹⁾ as well as on Site E.



Fig. 5. Pendant cross, Nd.99048
(Photo W. Godlewski)

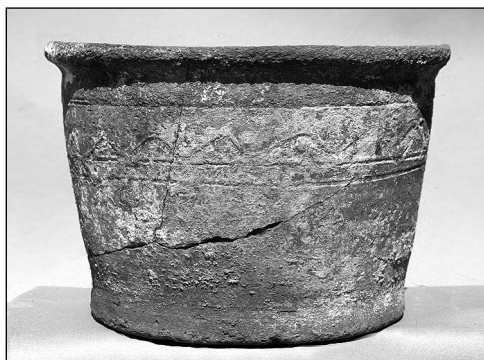


Fig. 6. Vase, Nd. 99274
(Photo W. Godlewski)

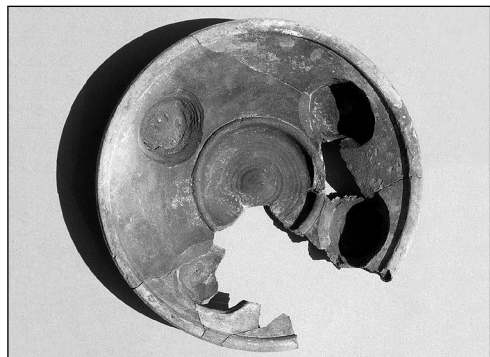


Fig 7. Bowl with depressions, Nd.99010
(Photo W. Godlewski)



Fig. 8. Lamp, Nd.99224
(Photo W. Godlewski)

⁹⁾ T. Górecki, "The pottery 1988-1989", *Nubica* III.1 (1994), 226-231, 239-255.