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BURIAL TUNICS FROM NAQLUN

Barbara Czaja-Szewczak

Among the trove of textiles that augmented last year's collection originating from burials at the Naqlun cemetery, tunics formed a distinctive group.¹⁾ They were made for the most part of linen in balanced plain weave, although woolen examples have also been recorded. Silk thread is found in the decorated parts of linen dress woven in tapestry weave. An analysis of the burials led to the conclusion that the tunics were treated both as undergarments and outer wear.²⁾

Three principal types of tunics can be distinguished among the garments excavated from the burials in Naqlun. The first was a sleeveless type called a bag tunic; the second a straight-sleeved tunic that generates immediate associations with an earlier garment referred to as *tunica inconsutilis*,³⁾ the third was very much like the modern *galabiyah*.

The bag-shaped tunic was a rectangular gore of fabric, sown together at the sides with slits left for the arms and a "bateau" – shaped neckline. This type of tunic came from the burials in tombs T. 292 (Nd.02.145), T. 300 (Nd.02.175), T. 316 (Nd.02.243), T. 316 (Nd.02.247), T. 323 (Nd.02.264 and Nd.02.327) and T. 311 (Nd.02.304). They were made of linen as well as wool, and were used as undergarments (inner tunic in direct contact

with the skin) and outer dress (outer tunic). The latter, if made of wool, was presumably used as a warmer covering on cool days.

Of special interest are two dark blue woolen tunics from tombs T. 299 (Nd.02.179) and T. 300 (Nd.02.175) (*Fig. 1*). In both cases the robes had been placed separately in the graves: in T. 299 near the chest of the deceased, in T. 300 near the head. The tunics were made of the same kind of fibers, in the same technique,

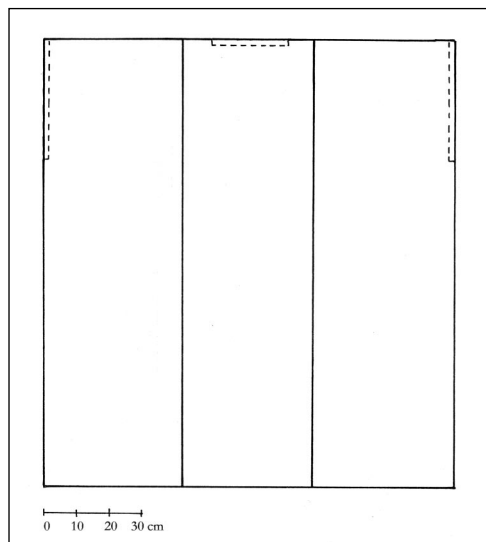


Fig. 1. Bag-shaped tunic from burial T. 300 (Nd.02.175) (Drawing B. Czaja-Szewczak)

- 1) For a report on the season's results, see contribution by W. Godlewski in this volume.
- 2) For remarks on burial textiles, including tunics, from earlier excavations of the cemetery at Naqlun, see report by B. Czaja-Szewczak, *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), esp. 136-141.
- 3) Spread out, the tunic forms the shape of a cross.

dyed with the same pigment and undecorated; both were also used in a typical fashion in the tomb. What differentiates them is their shape. Nd.02.175 (cf. *Fig. 1*) exemplifies the bag-shaped type,⁴ 137.0 cm long and 126.0 cm wide, with slits for the arms and neck left open in the seams of the woolen fabric. Nd.02.179 (*Fig. 2*) was a long-sleeved *tunica inconsutilis* with an oval neckline, the garment measuring 113.0 cm in length and 140.0 cm at the bottom; each sleeve was 100 cm long. The body of the tunic was made of three gores of fabric sown together to form a rectangle. The sleeves were also rectangular. In the two tombs the bodies of the dead were dressed in linen tunics of evidently burial character (see below).

Bag-shaped tunics made of linen in plain tabby were found in a number of tombs this season. Two of them accom-

panied the same burial, T. 232. The outer tunic, Nd.02.264, has survived in fragments and its full dimensions cannot be reconstructed. A patch of impregnated shroud linen was inserted on the left shoulder of the tunic. This patch was silk-embroidered with a band 3.3 cm wide, presenting birds in heraldic position, separated by schematic images of trees. Two blue strips, 0.4 cm wide, encased the ornamental band. The rest of the tunic was completely plain. The inner tunic, Nd.02.327, was fully preserved (148.0 cm long, 185.0 cm wide). It was evidently a burial garment without any finishing. It was sown of a few gores of linen basted together with a running stitch using linen thread. The side seams were sown together leaving only slits for the arms. A piece of impregnated linen of the kind used for shrouds was patched in on the right

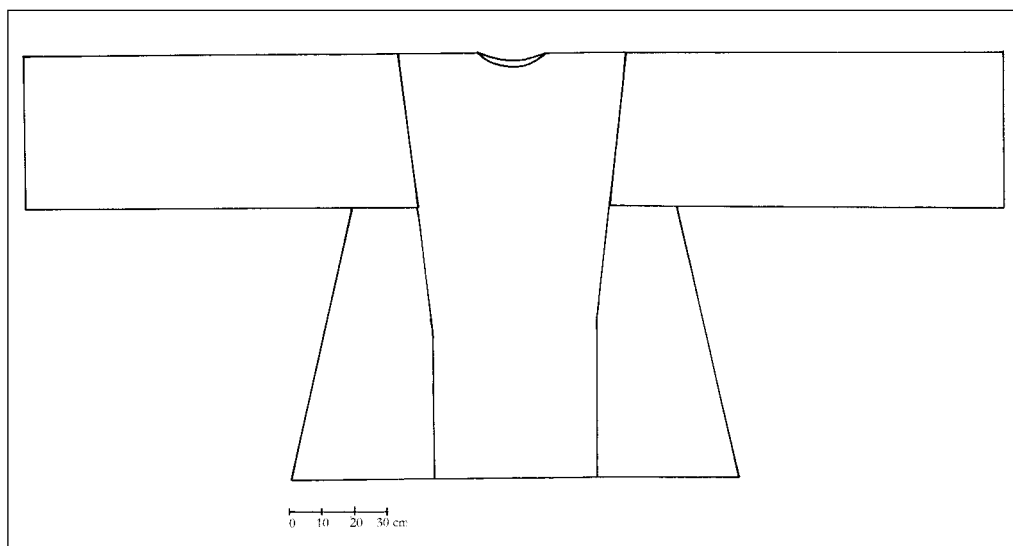


Fig. 2. Tunica inconsutilis type of garment from burial T. 299 (Nd.02.179)
(Drawing B. Czaja-Szewczak)

4) Of identical form is a woolen tunic with band ornament, Nd.00.083, explored from a burial in the Naqlun cemeteries in 2000. The band is made up of multiple-arm crosses alternating with Coptic inscriptions that presumably mean nothing, cf. W. Godlewski, *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 160.

shoulder. On this piece, 43.5 cm from the edge of the tunic, a band of decoration appeared, 2.0 cm wide, embroidered in black silk thread, most of which has crumbled away, making it impossible to reconstruct the pattern. Another ornamental band consisting of five thin stripes, 0.1 cm wide, appeared 20.0 cm away from this band. The bottom part of the tunic is currently in poor condition, but it seems that the fabric had been of one length, slit at the bottom to make an opening for the feet.

Tunic Nd.02.304 from T. 311, although not fully preserved, garners interest in view of the special treatment of the side seams. The piece, basted together from several gores, was 167.0 cm wide and of indeterminable length. The sides had not been sewn together, but the bottom edge in both corners had been stitched together for

a length of 21.0 cm, apparently in order to avoid, for example, the two sides floating freely in the wind.

The same concept applied to Nd.02.243 (Fig. 3) from burial T. 316. The sides of the tunic were 123.0 cm long, but at the center it measured 132.0 cm; the width at the bottom was 171.0 cm, growing to 180.0 cm at the top. The sides were stitched together only for about 37.0 cm from the bottom corners. The bottom edge is slightly rounded in outline giving a longer front and back in the center, thanks to which the owner could let his arms drop alongside his body without having the corners of the tunic drag over the ground.

The third type of tunic represented among the textile finds of the most recent season, as well as of previous ones, was a form closely resembling the modern *galabiyah*: Nd.02.099, Nd.02.189, Nd.02.213, Nd.02.328

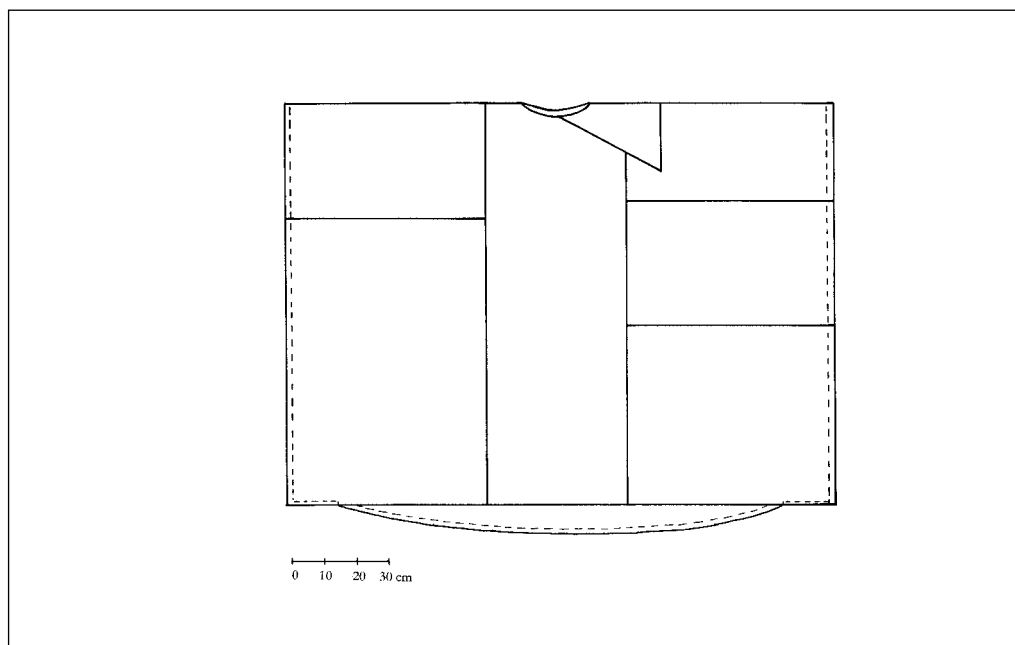


Fig. 3. Tunic Nd.02.243 from burial T. 316
(Drawing B. Czaja-Szewczak)

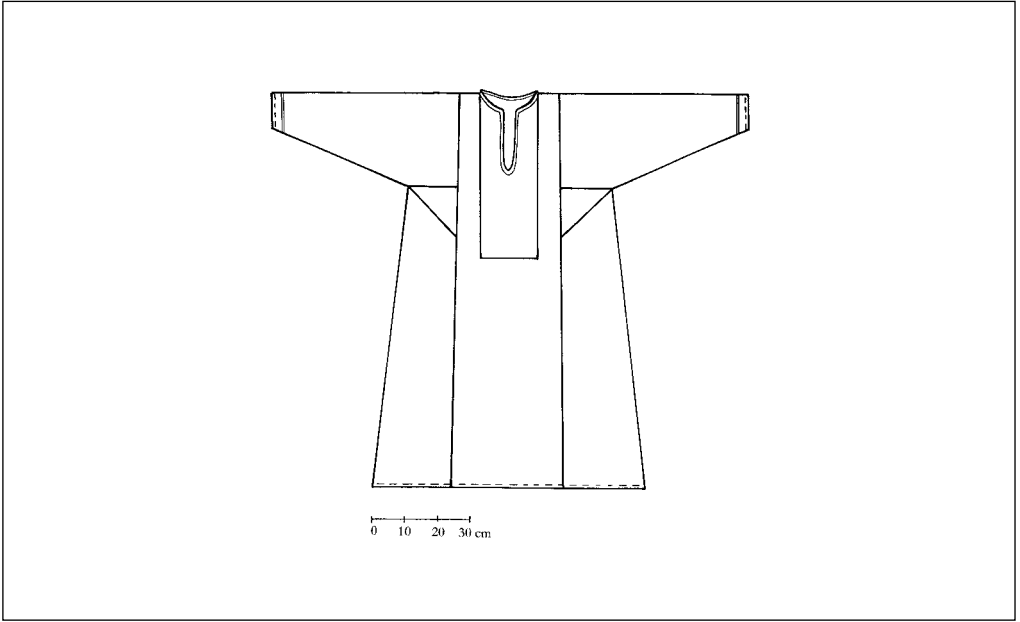


Fig. 4. Tunic of the modern galabiyah type (Nd.02.328)
(Drawing B. Czaja-Szewczak)

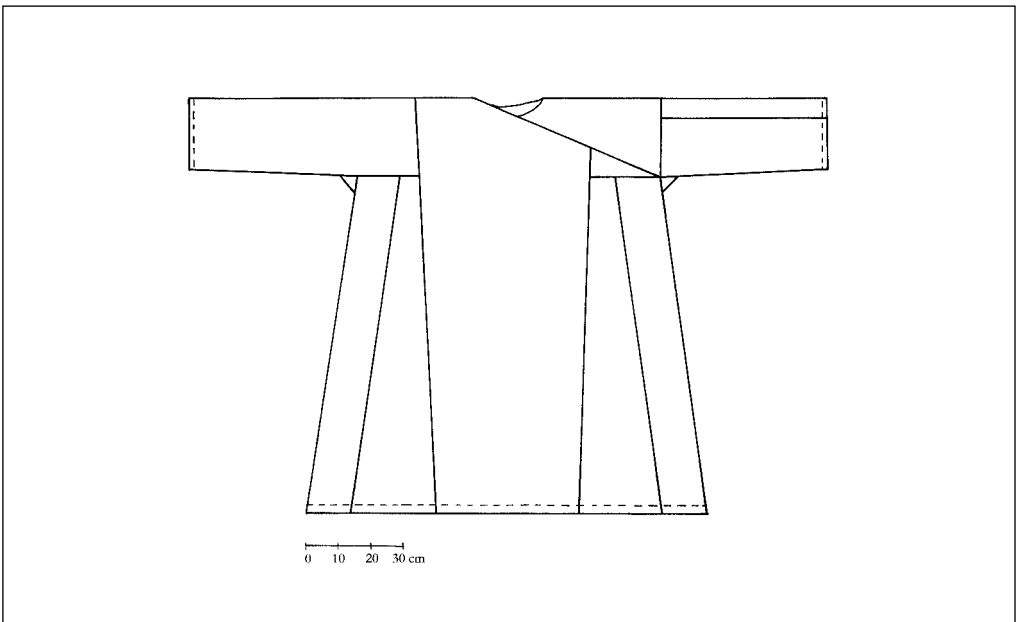


Fig. 5. Tunic of the modern galabiyah type (Nd.02.330)
(Drawing B. Czaja-Szewczak)

(Fig. 4), Nd.02.329, Nd.02.330 (Fig. 5), Nd.02.333 (Fig. 7), Nd.02.334. The sleeves in these tunics were long and the body of the dress flared toward the bottom as a result of two or four triangular gussets of an identical fabric set symmetrically into the sides. The gussets were not always of the same size with detriment to overall symmetry of the dress. The necklines in these tunics were either round or oval, and never too wide, so that for the head to pass through it, it was necessary to make meticulously finished cuts to enlarge the opening. These cuts were made either on one of the shoulders, i.e., Nd.02.330 (cf. Fig. 5) and Nd.02.334, or centrally on the front, i.e., Nd.02.189, Nd.02.328 (cf. Fig. 4). A fabric-made button occasionally served to close this slit, i.e., Nd.02.314 (Fig. 6). The neck opening was edged, i.e., Nd.02.244 and Nd.02.334, or else had a standing collar, i.e., Nd.02.060, Nd.02.061,

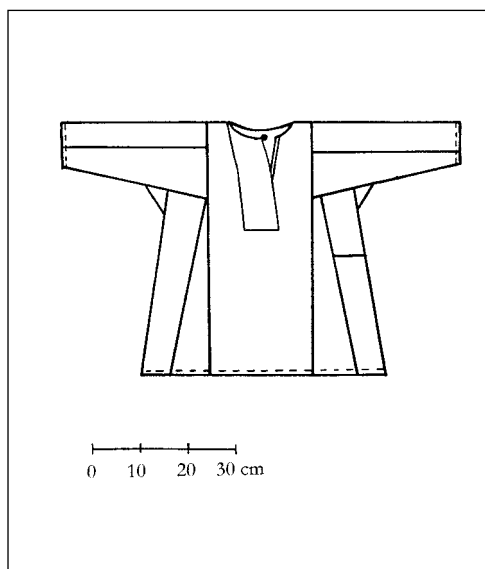


Fig 6. *Tunic of the galabiyah type with button closing slit in front of neckline (Nd.02.314). Note the different scale (Drawing B. Czaja-Szewczak)*

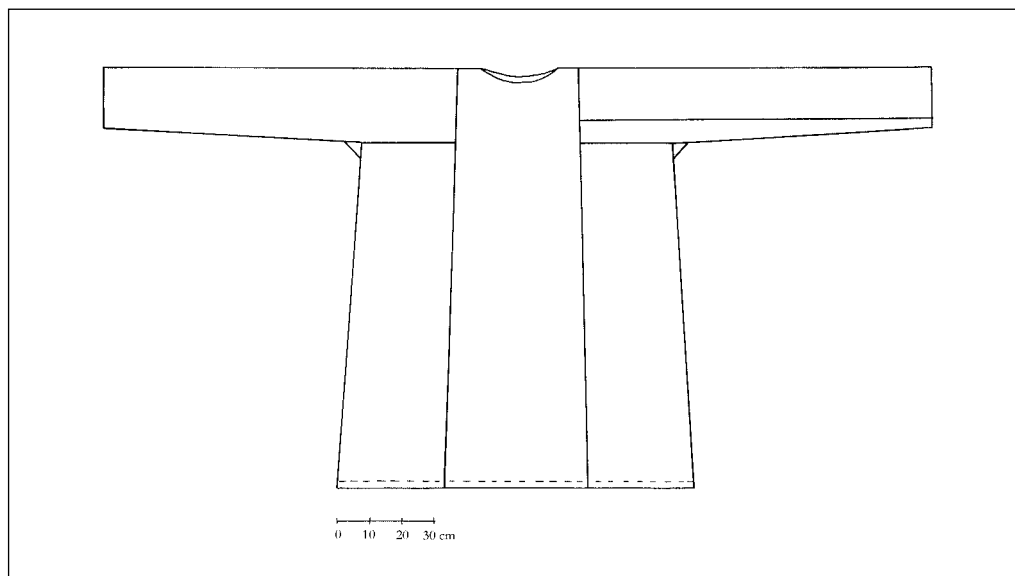


Fig. 7. *Tunic of the galabiyah type (Nd.02.333) (Drawing B. Czaja-Szewczak)*

Nd.02.127, Nd.02.328 (cf. *Fig. 4*), although there were examples of tunics where little effort had been put into the finishing of this opening, i.e., Nd.02.327. The long sleeves in the case of these tunics are either flaring or narrowing toward the hand; the

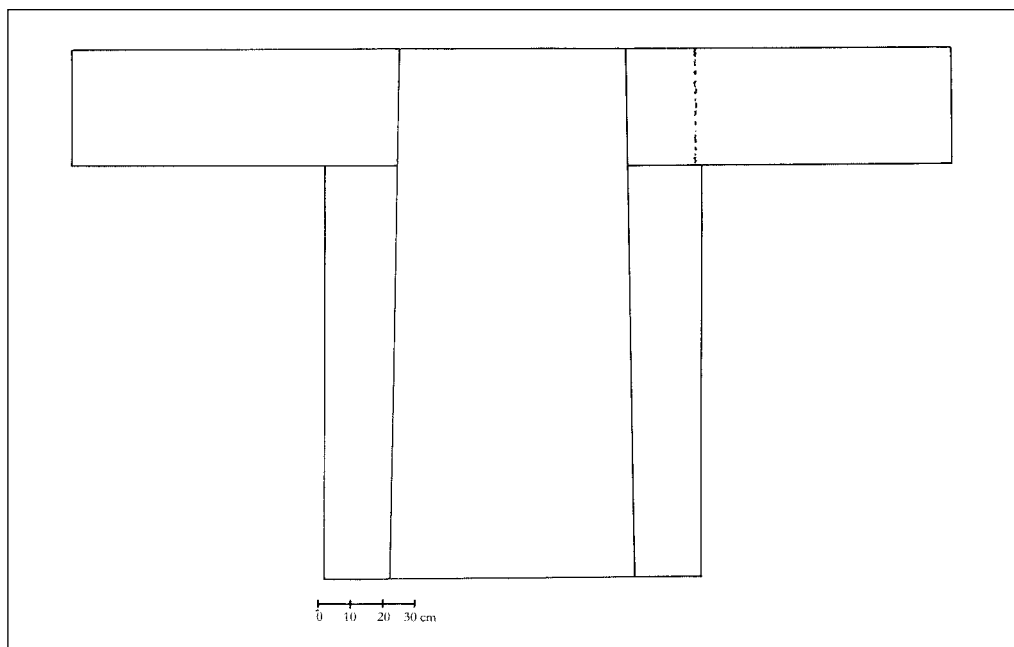
flaring effect was obtained by inserting gussets of appropriate width, cut from the same fabric as the tunic itself. Some of the sleeves are much longer than the arms of the dead person, from a few to a few dozen centimeters beyond the tip of the fingers.

BURIAL TUNICS

An analysis of this assemblage reveals a clear distinction between tunics of everyday use, frequently with evidence of wear and tear sustained during the owner's lifetime, and tunics of evidently burial character. Such tunics have been found in tombs T. 300, T. 299, T. 316 and T. 323. They either had long sleeves or were sleeveless (Nd.02.173, Nd.02.178 (*Fig. 8*), Nd.02.327, Nd.02.247). Their big size, simple design, careless finishing and highly specific fabric – unspun linen fibers

– suggest intended burial use. These textiles were further impregnated on the surface with a substance that made them stiffer and as if waxed on one side. This kind of linen fabric was frequently used for burial shrouds to cover the coffins or for wrapping the body inside the coffin. It does not seem probable that linen of this stiffness could have been in everyday use.

Neither was the design of the robe made complex in any way. Two rectangular pieces were sewn together for the body and



*Fig. 8. Burial tunic from T. 299 (Nd. 02.178)
(Drawing B. Czaja-Szewczak)*

two simple wide sleeves were stitched on at either side (Nd.02.173 and Nd.02.178, cf. *Fig. 8*), showing little respect for the rules of sewing. There is also one tunic (Nd.02.247) which was just basted together along the sides. The finishing in the case of these burial tunics, assuming we call them by this term, was never fine, the side seams being basted at best and the sleeve and bottom hems, as well as neck openings, left raw, unfinished. An element shared by these tunics and shrouds, which are made of identical fabric, is the decoration, a characteristic silk embroidery in parallel bands.

The linen tunics were usually made of undyed fabric (only bleached, either the fibers or the fabric). Blue-colored tunics are seldom seen in the record. The color, indigo presumably, is not intense, the pigment having been deposited only superficially on the linen surface (linen is generally hard to dye, as it does not easily absorb pigments), resembling washed-out jeans at best. The two woolen tunics exca-

vated this year (Nd.02.175, Nd.02.179) are dyed dark blue, presumably also with indigo (lab analyses are necessary for pigment identification).

The decoration on linen tunics consists of mainly inserts made in tapestry weave, e.g. Nd.02.099, Nd.02.213 (the weft is dyed silk thread). Their arbitrary position and the fragmentariness of the ornament, which seems to have been extracted from a bigger whole, indicate that the inserts had been cut out of another fabric and patched into the dress in order to vary the plain colorless surface.

The specifically burial tunics excepted, the other clothes were part of the ordinary everyday attire of the people who were buried in them. Some bear evidence of wear, mechanical damages and repairs by patching and darning (e.g. Nd.02.329). Unfortunately, the poor condition of many of these tunics, caused by the effects of flesh decomposition, is often a barrier to any determination of the actual wear of the clothes prior to burial.

PROTECTION AND COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION OF TEXTILES IN 2002

All the textiles excavated in 2002 underwent the same basic treatment to preserve them and prepare for storage. The first step was to clean the surface of dirt, sand and dust with brushes and mini vacuum cleaner. This was followed by a water bath. The first preliminary rinsing in water removed substantial superficial dirt; a washing and softening agent (PRETEPON G) was added to the second and successive rinsings, and a biocidal agent, either PREVENTOL or NEODESOGEN, to the final wash. The textiles were then placed on a netted frame to dry. Delicate ironing removed wrinkles that rendered proper photographic documentation difficult. After being fully

documented, the textiles were placed in envelopes, preferably of acid-free paper, additionally protected with Japanese tissue paper, if required, and stored in a separate, appropriately adapted cupboard in the expedition stores.

Special treatment was necessary occasionally, as in the case of the textile from T. 311 (Nd.02.303). A scalpel had to be used to detach the brittle and delicate fabric from the coffin walls. Obviously, washing in water was out of the question, so after a preliminary brushing, the silk remains were placed on glass, covered with a net and moistened. This was followed by delicate tamponing with a natural sponge

soaked in foam generated by fabric softener PRETEPON G. The textile was rinsed repeatedly with water and finally with a solution of PREVENTOL, after which it was left on the glass to dry. Since it was too brittle to be stored in an envelope, it was left between two glass panes, protected additionally with acid-free paper.

Routine examination of stored textiles coming from the excavation in earlier seasons indicated the need for comprehensive treatment in the case of Nd.93.016 (Fig. 9). To remove the dirt from among the fibers, which had remained after preliminary cleaning in a previous season, the textile was put in a water bath mixed with PRETEPON G, rinsed thoroughly, spread on a glass pane and left to dry. Next it was

sprayed with biocidal agent LICHENICIDE 264 in ethyl alcohol, and following normal procedure, the crystallized remains of the substance, whatever had not evaporated, were removed with mini vacuum cleaner. The textile was then doubled on modern canvas plain-tabby linen to take the pressure off the ancient object, taking care to have the fibers of both in parallel alignment. It was then attached to the ground with laid stitch and point stitching using silk thread. Special metalcomplex pigments were applied to dye the thread to imitate the colors of the fabric under conservation. The last step was to mount the protected textile on cardboard covered with Japanese tissue paper and store in an envelope of acid-free paper.

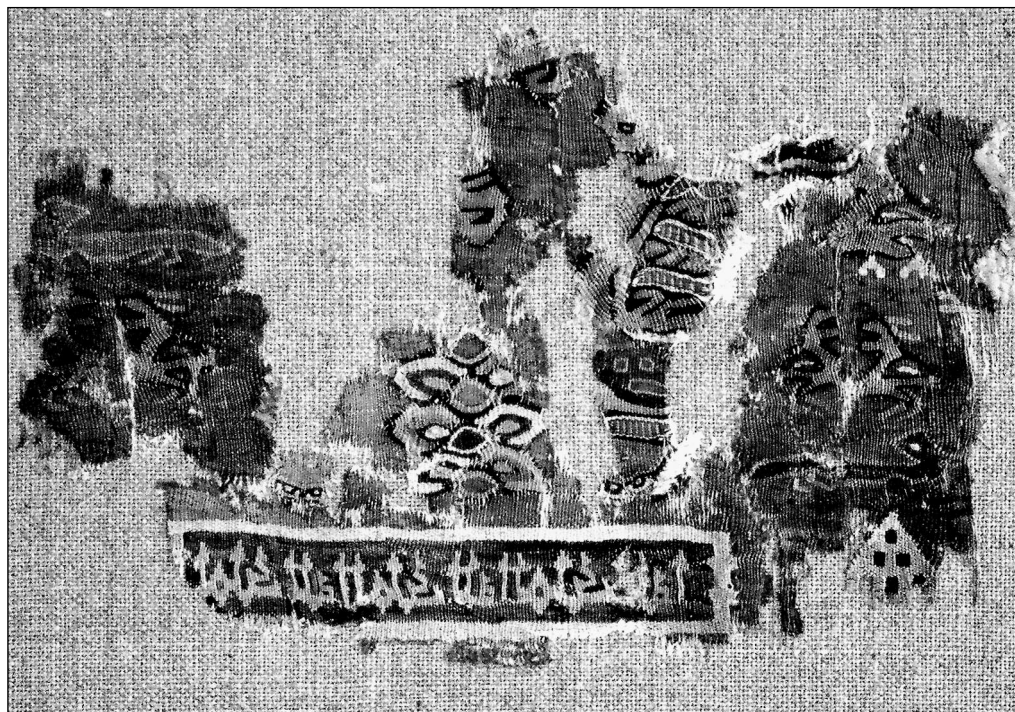


Fig. 9. Textile with Arabic inscription (Nd.93.035) after conservation
(Photo B. Czaja-Szewczak)