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Naqlun (Nekluni): Season 2003

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 15, 141-151

2004

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NAQLUN (NEKLONI)

Season 2003

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The 2003 field campaign of the Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University at the site of Naqlun (Deir el Malak Gubriel) in the Fayum was carried out between September 7 and October 8. Following upon last year's discovery of a sizable assemblage of textiles coming from a Christian cemetery of the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods on site A in the central part of the kom,¹⁾ the team concentrated on documenting and studying this category of finds. A final review, prior to publication, of the Greek and Coptic documents from the seasons 1986-1990, deposited in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, was also carried out. Some archaeological investigations of the monastic complex on Site A were undertaken.²⁾

The work proceeded efficiently and according to plan thanks to all-encompassing assistance from the Authorities of the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the Coptic Museum in Cairo, as well as the SCA staff in Fayum, especially Mr. Ibrahim Ragab, the inspector attached to the expedition, to whom we are immensely indebted. The generous hospitality of the monks from the Naqlun monastery is acknowledged with equal gratitude.

1) Reported on by W. Godlewski, J. van der Vliet, B. Czaja-Szewczak and A. Łyżwa in *PAM XIV, Reports 2002* (2003), 163-195.

2) The Mission was directed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski and included: Dr. Jacques van der Vliet, coptologist; Dr. Tomasz Derda, papyrologist; Dr. Christian Gaubert, arabist; Dr. Gisele Helmecke, arabist and art historian; Ms Barbara Czaja-Szewczak, textile restorer; Mr. Tomasz Szmagier, photographer; Mrs. Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert, archaeologist; Mr. Szymon Maślak and Mr. Grzegorz Ochała, students of archaeology.

STUDY WORK AT THE COPTIC MUSEUM

Thanks to the dedicated cooperation of Coptic Museum authorities, the required study work on the textual finds from the 1986-1989 seasons, kept at the museum's Department of Manuscripts, could be concluded successfully. With little time at his disposal, T. Derda focused on the documents which are to be published soon in the second volume of "The Greek Papyri from Deir el-Naqlun". Seven cards of a papyrus codex (Nd.88/110) containing The Book of Psalms in Greek were inspected. Their text (Ps. 68.12-74.8) was collated with a standard Rahlfs edition.³⁾ Other documents studied

in depth included: Nd.88.045, Nd.88.047 and Nd.88.116 – three private letters connected in one way or another with the life of the monastic community of Naqlun in the 6th century; Nd.88.112 – a business note prepared for an official of the monastery. An important discovery are three small fragments of letters (Nd.86.129, Nd.88.117, and Nd.88.252) addressed to bishop Nikolaos, residing at the Naqlun monastery in the 6th century. He is not an entirely unknown personage, since a letter (no. 12) sent by him to a *comes* Basileios has already been published by T. Derda.⁴⁾

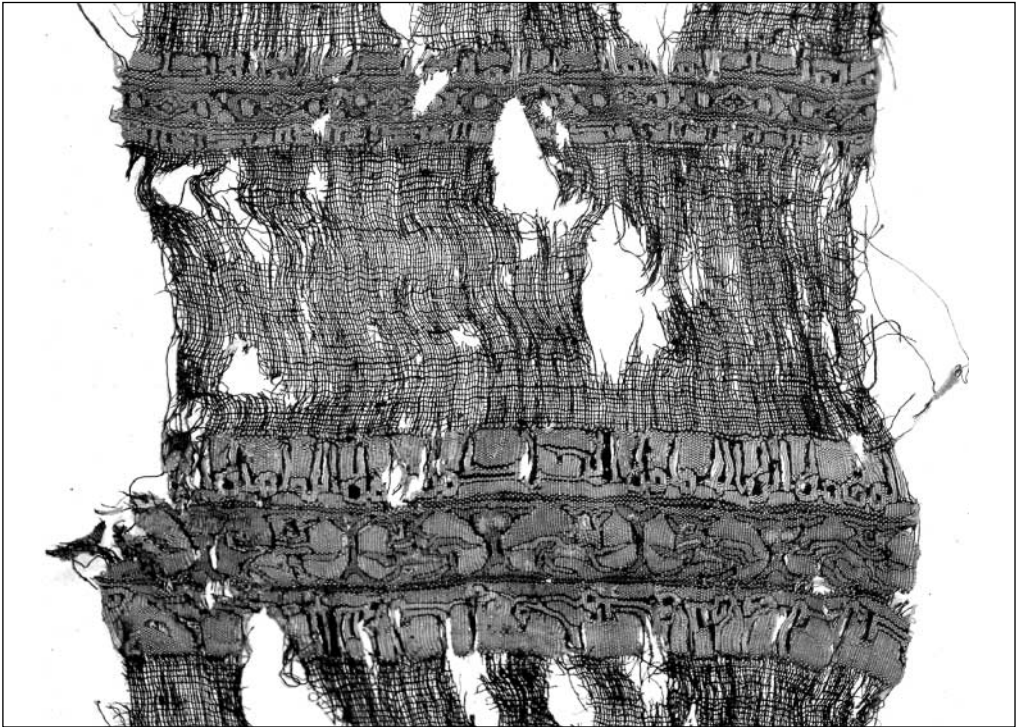


Fig. 1. Fragment of linen and silk shawl (Nd.02.205). Arabic text with the name of Caliph al-Hakim (385-411 AH/AD 996-1020) (Photo T. Szmajder)

3) A. Rahlfs, *Psalmi cum Odis*, 3rd edition (Goettingen 1979).

4) T. Derda, *Deir el-Naqlun: The Greek Papyri (P.Naqlun I)* (Warsaw 1995), 153-163.

J. van der Vliet prepared for publication the Coptic texts from the 1986 (20 items), 1987 (9) and 1988 (5) seasons. All but a few very small and insignificant fragments were taken into consideration. The

texts from the 1989 season had been edited earlier by the Late K. Urbaniak.⁵⁾ These were briefly inspected, but since her work has proved up to standard, there is presently no need to go back to these texts.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE TEXTILES

Over 340 textiles were documented and photographed by T. Szmagier. The textiles, which are all from the tombs of a Christian cemetery excavated in 2002 on site A, date from the late 11th to the 13th century.

B. Czaja-Szewczak doubled the woolen tunic Nd.00.082 onto linen cloth in order to preserve it. J. van der Vliet identified the Coptic texts on the tunic as fragments of psalm Ps.46:2-3 in Sahidic.

G. Helmecke took time to study the 73 pieces of textiles with Arabic text, identifying three Fatimid *tiraz* texts in the process. One *tiraz* (Nd.02.205) bore the name of the Caliph al-Hakim (385-411 AH/AD 996-1020) (Fig. 1).

Another (Nd.00.073) is likely to bear the name of the Caliph al-Mustansir (327-487 AH/AD 1035-1094).⁶⁾ Finally, the third (Nd.02.221) belongs either to the reign of the son of al-Hakim, Caliph az-Zahir (411-

427 AH/AD 1021-1035), or to the times of az-Zahir's successor, Caliph al-Mustansir (Fig. 2).

The other Arabic texts are nearly all embedded in the ornamental decoration of the fabrics. One group gives the usual repertoire of short pious formulas in repetition. The longest one is "*nasr min allah wa-fath qarib*" (victory/success from God and near success/victory). Others include "*al-mulk li-llah*" (power belongs to God), or "*baraka min allah*" (God's blessing). The word "*allah*" is repeated in some cases. Two of the three examined silks bear the word "*baraka*" (blessings) in repetition. Another group of textiles, especially the embroidered ones, have only ornamental designs deriving from repeated words or letters without intelligible sense. The inscriptions and pseudo-inscriptions are written both in Kufic and in cursive scripts.

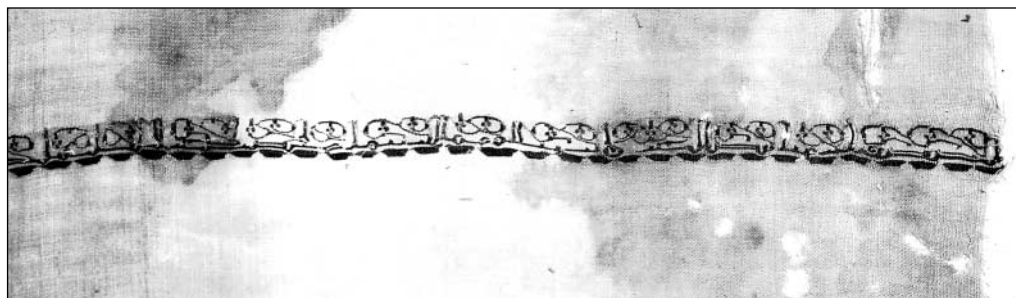


Fig. 2. Fragment of linen and silk coffin shroud (Nd.02.221) with dated Arabic inscription (Photo T. Szmagier)

5) K. Urbaniak, "Naqlun. Koptische Texte", *JJP* 23 (1993), 157-162; id., *JJP* 25 (1995), 165-170.

6) B. Czaja-Szewczak, "Naqlun. Textiles conservation 2001", *PAM XIII, Reports 2001* (2002), 178-180, fig. 1.

EXCAVATIONS IN CEMETERY A

The fieldwork this season was conceived specifically with the purpose of establishing the extent of the medieval burial ground, especially to the south, east and northeast of Church A. Survey work south of the church, where a few grave markers had been uncovered in 2002, revealed the presence of a few dozen more tombs, many with heavily eroded masonry superstructures. This area appears to have held the most important tombs of the necropolis. As superstructures and associated graves should be investigated concurrently, no further clearing of these tomb structures was endeavored prior to the next season when they will become the object of diligent excavation. More tombs also appeared in the southwestern part of the site where the entrance to the late monastic compound (AA.40.4) is being cleared; this late building was burned

down and subsequently abandoned at the turn of the 9th century. Two tombs next to the entrance (T. 337 and T. 338) were removed in the course of the explorations. To the east and northeast of Church A, where the medieval monastic buildings A.H and A.G contemporary with Church A were located, only single graves have been noted. This clearly indicates that the area here was already on the fringes of the burial ground.

Three graves were recorded within the area covered by Building A.H, just near the central entrance. In one that was explored (T. 339), the body turned out to be robbed in linen dress and wrapped in a linen shroud. He had been laid to rest in a wooden coffin with no grave goods. The tomb is believed to be from a late stage in the existence of the graveyard (13th-14th century; *Fig. 3*).



*Fig. 3. Open coffin of T. 339
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

Exploration in room E.1 adjoining the east façade of Church A, where a few dozen graves were discovered in 2002 (including a few earlier burials destroyed by secondary internments made inside this room), brought to light fragments attributable to one of these damaged earlier tombs (T. 342). The woman interred in this grave proved to have a well-preserved diadem in her hair under the shawl. The diadem was

composed of five silver dirhams from the middle of the 8th century (AD 739-758)⁷⁾ and three circular plaques, also of silver and about the size of the coins (Dia. 25 mm), decorated with impressed animal and bird motifs. A provisional dating of this jewelry puts it in the 11/12th century. The coins and ornamental plaques were threaded onto a double woolen strand (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. *Diadem (Nd.03.061) composed of five silver dirham coins (AD 739-758) and three silver plaques (Photo W. Godlewski)*

7) Dr. G. Helmecke kindly identified the coins.

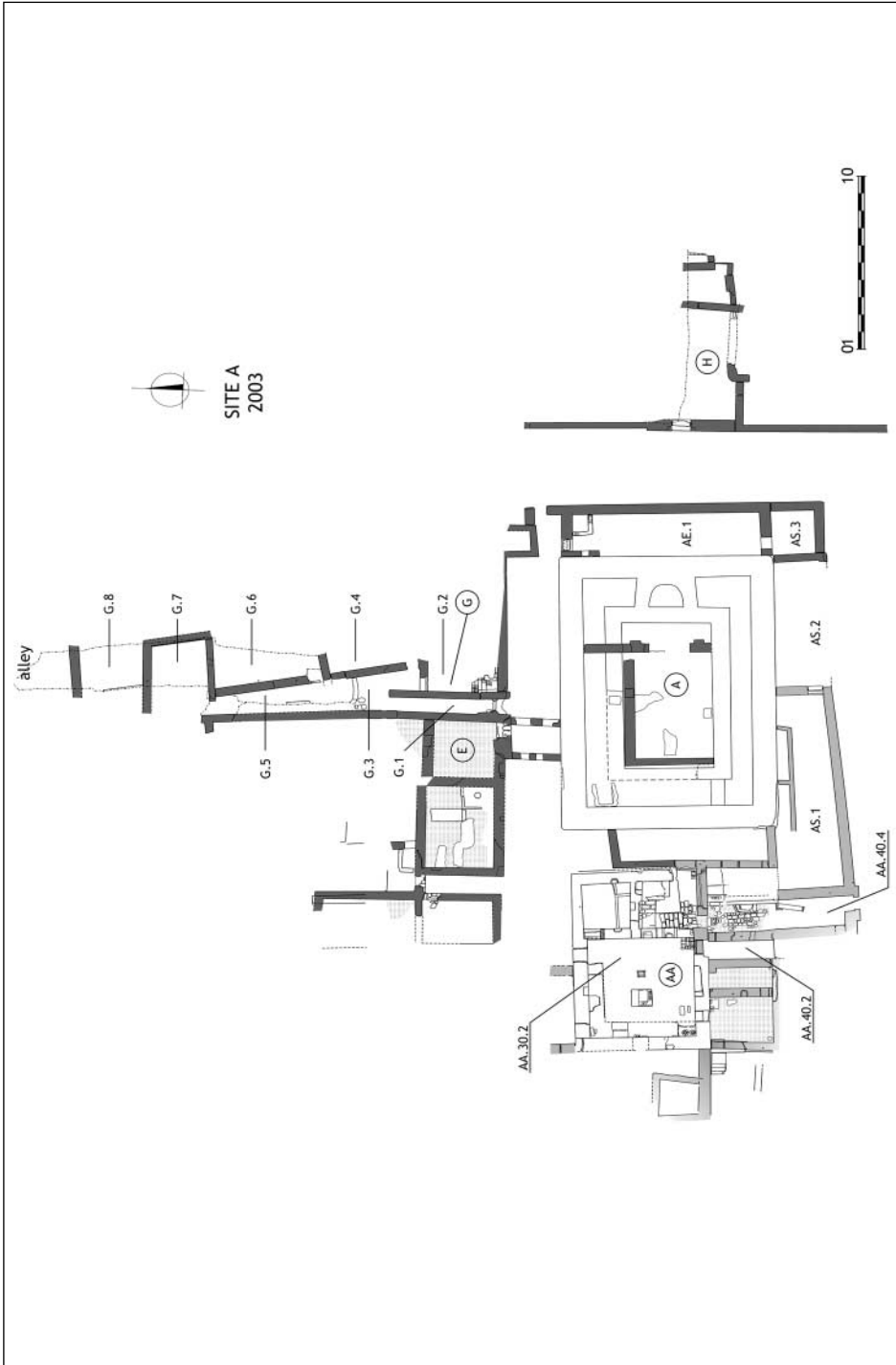


Fig. 5. Naqlun 2003. Plan of the medieval monastic compound on Site A (Drawing J. Dobrowolski, W. Godlewski, D. Zielińska)

MEDIEVAL MONASTIC COMPOUND

Fragments of regular monastic architecture contemporary with Church A were cleared in the course of the explorations carried out to the north and east of the church (*Fig. 5*). Two spacious structures (E and G) were located north of the church, separated from the church façade by a street (passage) running from east to west. Complementing the previous investigation of Building E in 1997-2000⁸) was a trench 3.5 m wide and 25 m long, dug this year

alongside the west wall of Building G. A narrow alley oriented east-west was discovered separating Building G from the elaborate Building D that had been explored in the northern part of the kom in 1987-1997. Building G was constructed of baked brick and mud brick and it was apparently rebuilt at least twice. The walls rise to a height of 100-130 cm on average, the inside faces revealing fine plastering (*Fig. 6*).



Fig. 6. Site A. Building G, entrance seen from the south (Photo W. Godlewski)

8) Cf. PAM X, *Reports 1998* (1999), 116-117; PAM XI, *Reports 1999* (2000), 130-132; PAM XII, *Reports 2000* (2001), 154-161.

The fill inside the building consisted of debris from the upper parts of the walls. The structure appears to have been used until the abandonment of Church A. The burial ground encroached on the southern part of the building once the architecture here went out of use. Further work is required to trace the plan and determine

the function of particular rooms in Building G.

Excavations brought to light some interesting objects: wooden pieces, such as keys and part of a lock (*Fig. 8*), as well as some wooden fragments used in wall construction, and a limestone pilaster capital dated to c. AD 500 (*Fig. 7*).



*Fig. 7. Limestone pilaster capital, Nd.03.049
(Photo W. Godlewski)*



*Fig. 8. Part of a wooden door lock, Nd.03.050
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

Several Arabic and Coptic texts on paper were also found; they were recorded by J. van der Vliet. The former included some fragmentary monastic business letters and a magic text. The latter consisted of an interesting 10th-11th century account of work at the water-wheel, as well as fragments of an account-book, containing numerous proper names (Fig. 9).

In the early stages of the monastery, the area east of Church A apparently consisted of open ground. Sometime in the 9th or early 10th century, room E.1 was added onto the eastern church façade. This large hall (inside dimensions 11.10 x 2.82-2.93 m) was entered from the north and south, and initially served some domestic function, possibly as an animal pen, if the thick layer of fibrous *sebach* is taken into account. With time the building was turned into a large mausoleum with over 30 tombs that were explored in 2002.

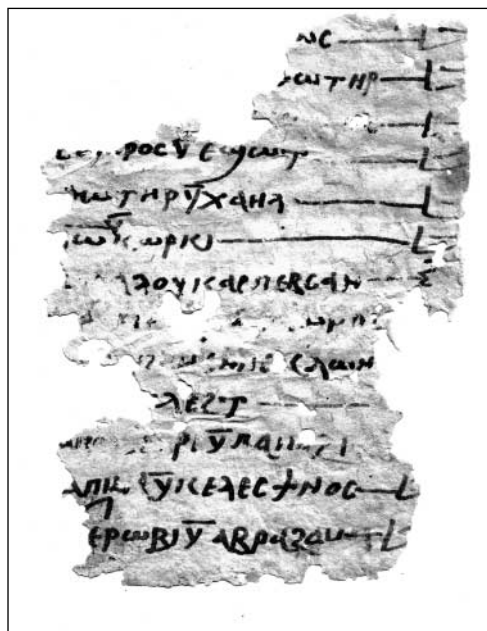


Fig. 9. List of names in Coptic, Nd.03.049.3b
(Photo W. Godlewski)



Fig. 10. Site A. Building H, seen from the west
(Photo W. Godlewski)

A wide street (4.80-5.15 m) ran alongside room E.1 from north to south, giving access to Building H on its east side. Building H was a large structure which was also rebuilt in medieval times (*Fig. 10*). Its western wall has been uncovered together with the entrance from the street. A test pit in the central section of the building revealed the stratigraphy of occupational phases and stages of interior rebuilding. In the last phase of Building H, a few graves were dug in its western end. Of these one was now explored (T. 339).

EARLY MONASTIC ARCHITECTURE
West of Tower A of the 6th century⁹⁾ there extended Building AA.30.1-3, which was developed at some point in time to include new rooms (AA.40.1-6) on the south. The enlarged structure was ultimately destroyed in the end of the 9th or even in the early 10th century AD.¹⁰⁾ It was explored largely in 2000, but without the southern entrance, which was suggested by the presence of a corridor (AA.40.4) leading from the south to the building's staircase. An extension of the trench this season revealed the external



*Fig. 11. Site A. Building AA. The south entrance to corridor AA.40.4
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

9) Tower A was recently recognized as a church by Dr. P. Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten* (Leiden-Boston-Köln 2002), 513.

10) Cf. W. Godlewski, "Naqlun. Excavations 2001", *PAM XIII*, op. cit., 159-168; for work in the 2000 season, cf. *PAM XII*, op. cit., 150-154.

jambes of the south entrance, meticulously constructed of baked brick and white-washed. The width on the outside is 84 cm, reaching 106 cm on the inside (*Fig. 11*).

The corridor itself is 200 cm wide. The current work also demonstrated that the

enlarged Building AA was linked to a room situated south of Tower A (A.S.3). The entire complex burned down and the ruins were subsequently pitted by the graves of the medieval burial ground covering all of site A.