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Naqlun, Egipt : Excavations in 2012

Światowit : rocznik poświęcony archeologii przeddziejowej i badaniom pierwotnej kultury polskiej i słowiańskiej 10 (51)/A, 193-201

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Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

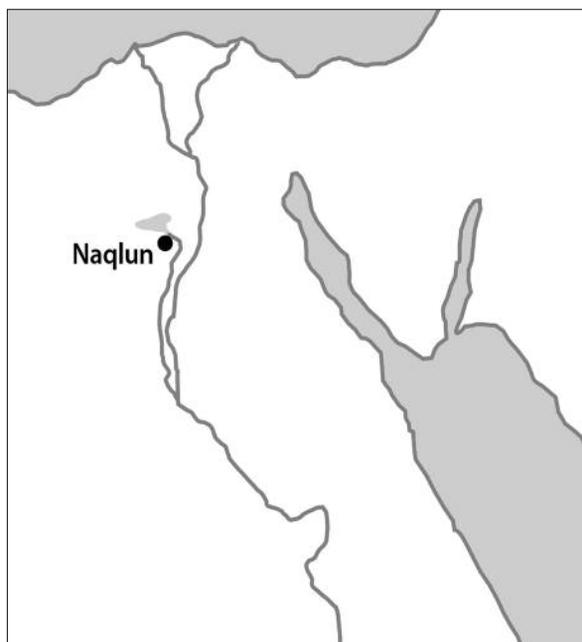
WŁODZIMIERZ GODLEWSKI

NAQLUN, EGYPT. EXCAVATIONS IN 2012

The mission from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw, directed by the author, completed another season of excavations at the site of the monastery of *Nekloni*/Naqlun in Fayum. The season lasted from 1 September until 26 September, 2012, and had the following objectives: continuation of works on Kom A in its southern part, restoration of metal objects, and study of coins and mud stoppers.¹

Monastic complex on Kom A

In order to obtain a broader understanding of the monastic complex, work was conducted in the southern part of the Kom, in eight trenches (2012.0–2012.7) opened between the central administrative complex of the monastery (Buildings A, AA and J) and the southern dump used by the monastic community since the establishment of the monastery at the turn of the 5th and the 6th c. until the destruction of the administrative complex in the mid-10th c. as a result of a massive conflagration. The investigation of this relatively vast area allowed to ascertain the existence of structures used for economic activity throughout the southern part of Kom A (Fig. 1). These buildings were relatively poorly preserved. Bricks from the walls of individual buildings were most likely re-used to construct the wall that encircles the medieval monastic complex built around the church of Archangel Gabriel (Deir Malak Gubrail) in the 13th–14th c. Thus, the rooms brought to light had relatively well-preserved floors, made of mud plaster as well as gravel and lime, often reinforced with a brick preparation layer, while the walls were discernible only as relics or even negatives.



It is beyond doubt that most of the investigated rooms were industrial in character. The above is indicated by their extant furnishings, such as the basin in Trench 2012.3 (Fig. 2) or the small cellar in Trench 2012.0 (Fig. 3), but above all by tools recovered from room fills – for instance the massive wooden pestles (Nd.12.023 and Nd.12.114–115) (Fig. 4). Pottery uncovered in the course of the excavations was also industrial in nature: it mainly consisted of amphorae, produced locally (LRA 7), as well as in North Africa and Palestine. They constitute excellent evidence of how the market functioned in the Fayum in the 9th–10th c.

¹ The staff of the Mission included: Dr Dorota Dzierzbicka, archaeologist (IA UW); Dr Gisela Helmecke, Arabist and art historian (The Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin); Mr Szymon Maślak, archaeologist (PCMA UW); Mr Władysław Weker, restorer of metal objects (State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw); Ms Katarzyna Danys-Lasek, ceramologist (freelance);

Mr Łukasz Krupski, archaeologist (freelance), and Mr Łukasz Jarmużek, archaeologist (IA UW). The Supreme Council for Antiquities, department in Fayum, was represented by Mr Goma Helmi Abderrahman, inspector of the SCA in Fayum, and Mr Ibrahim Ragab Ahmed, archaeologist in charge of the Mission Storehouse in Naqlun.

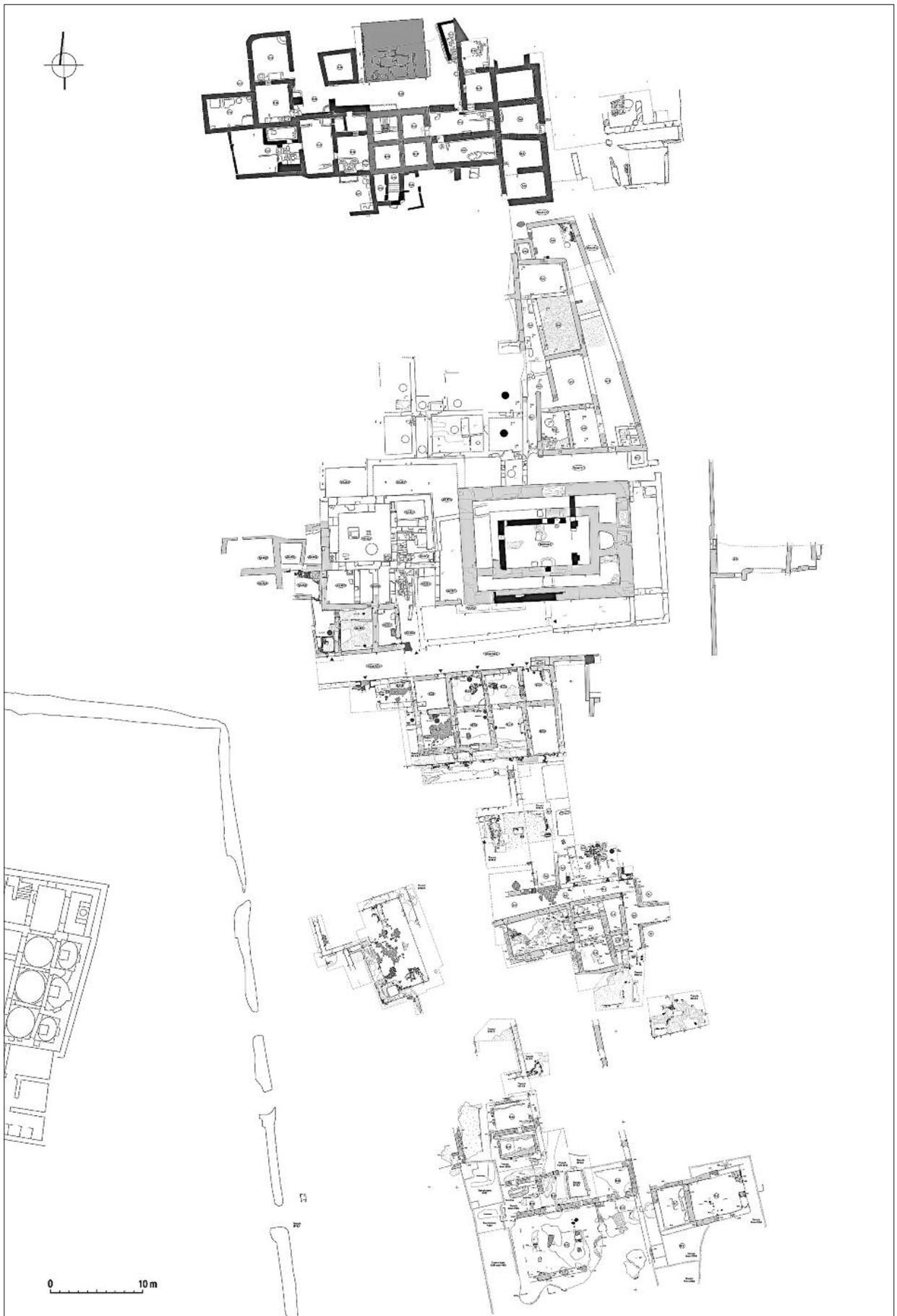


Fig. 1. Naqlun. Kom A. Monastery buildings (Drawing S. Maślak; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 1. Naqlun. Zabudowa monastyczna na komie A.



Fig. 2. Naqlun. Kom A. Trench 2012.3. Basin (Photo W. Godlewski; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 2. Naqlun, kom A. Wykop 2012.3. Basen.

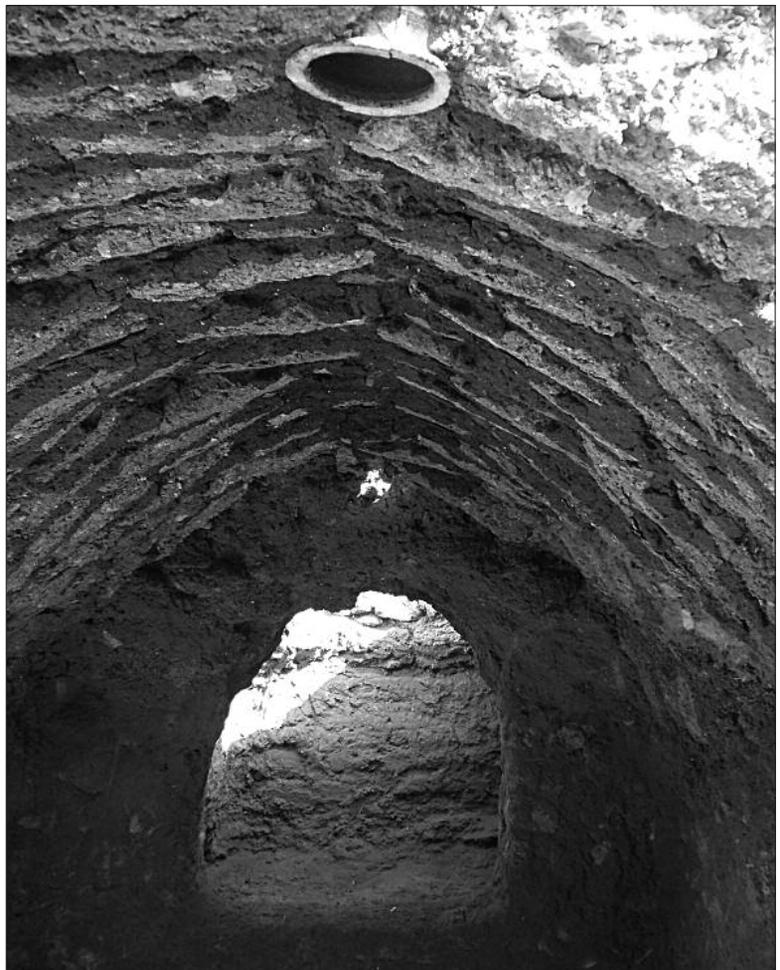


Fig. 3. Naqlun. Kom A. Trench 2012.0. Interior of the small cellar, view from the south (Photo W. Godlewski; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 3. Naqlun, kom A. Wnętrze małej piwniczki w wykopie 2012.0. Widok od południa.



Fig. 4. Wooden pestle (Nd.12.115), 10th c. (Photo W. Godlewski; Archive of PCMA).
Ryc. 4. Drewniany tłuczek (Nd.12.115), X w.

A noteworthy find is a huge Palestinian amphora bearing an Arabic inscription on the body. It is a sort of address: a man, most likely a Muslim, sends the amphora with contents to a monk residing in the monastery (Fig. 5).

Inside one of the rooms in Trench 2012.3 was found a bottle with two dozens dried fish, well preserved and left by one of the tenants of the monastery over one thousand years ago (Fig. 6).

Glass finds, unfortunately preserved in fragments, as well as wooden objects, were also brought to light. Several

texts on paper and parchment, also fragmentarily preserved, were written in both Coptic and Arabic (Fig. 7). One of the leather book binding (Nd.12.021), of considerable dimensions (h. 34 cm, w. 23.5cm), was uncovered in Trench 2012.0 (Fig. 8).

In Trench 2012.7, located on the northern edge of the refuse dump, a small “subterranean” room was uncovered. It measured 5 m² in area and was covered with a fragmentarily preserved vault. Because of the presence of extant niches it can be interpreted as a dwelling; although the

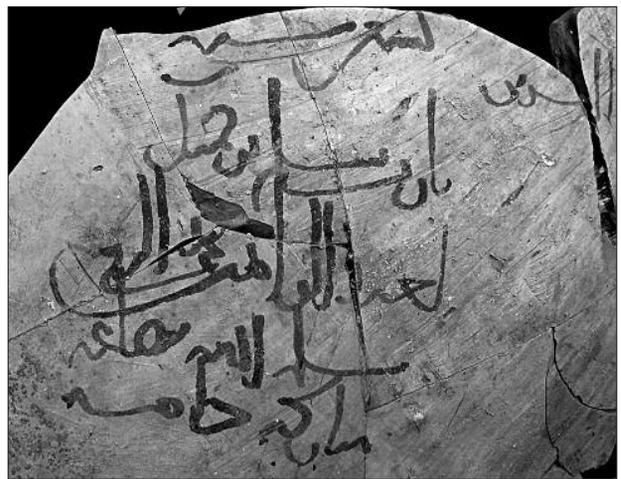


Fig. 5. Palestinian amphora (a) with Arabic inscription (b), Nd.12.121 (Photo W. Godlewski; Archive of PCMA).
Ryc. 5. Palestyńska amfora (a) z arabską inskrypcją (b), Nd.12.121.



Fig. 6. Broken bottle with dried fishes (Photo W. Godlewski; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 6. Rozbita butla z zasuszonymi rybami.

doorway to this chamber has not been located, it may be part of a larger complex (Fig. 9). The structural characteristics of the room, namely the bricks and building technique, point to a 10th c. dating, which is corroborated by the pottery from deposits constituting the fill of the room.

Conservation of metal objects

Work was continued by Mr Władysław Weker, a conservator from the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw. Objects made of copper and its alloys, silver, and iron were subjected to treatment (Fig. 10).

The objects were recovered from a desert environment and the corrosion process was slow in dry conditions. A part of the finds subjected to conservation had a thin layer of oxides resulting from the slow oxidation of the surface in arid climate. Some of the objects were so well preserved that only light cleaning and surface protection was needed (e.g. ring Nd.02.276). However, the surface of most finds was damaged or partly deformed due to corrosion processes. The most severely damaged objects were an iron nail (Nd.00.227) and a bracelet made of the same material (Nd.00.220). In both cases the metal core was not preserved and the surface suffered far-reaching deformation.

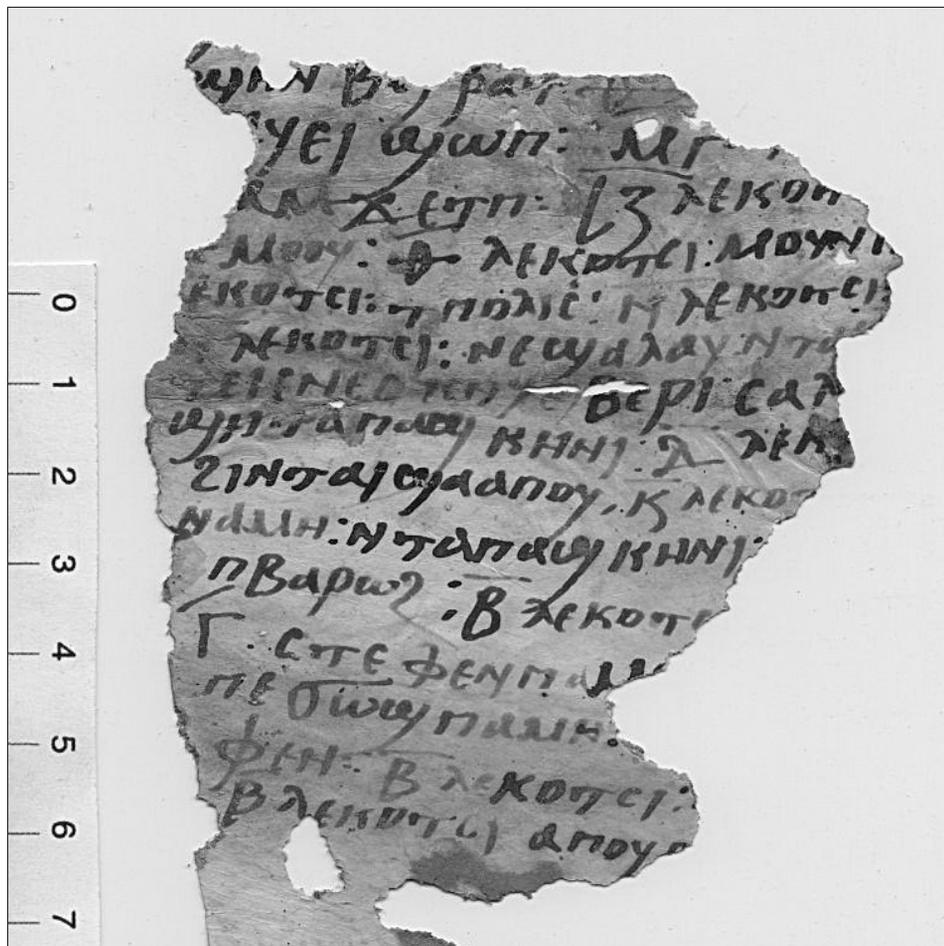


Fig. 7. Coptic document – list of payments, parchment (Photo W. Godlewski; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 7. Dokument koptyjski, lista wypłat pieniędzy, pergamin.



Fig. 8. A binding of a codex, leather (Nd.12.021) (Photo Ł. Krupski; Archive of PCMA).
Ryc. 8. Okładka kodeksu, skóra (Nd.12.021).



Fig. 9. Naqlun, Kom A. Trench 2012.7. A small cellar (Photo W.Godlewski; Archive of PCMA).
Ryc. 9. Naqlun, kom A. Wykop 2012.7. Mała piwnica.

Several objects, i.a. one nail (Nd.93.109) and an undefined bronze object (Nd.09.557), bore a well-preserved “fire patina” – a layer of oxides created as a result of exposure to high temperatures. The coat of oxides served as a protective layer thanks to which the finds were much better preserved.

The cleaning of the objects was done using mechanical methods, with the help of various scrapers, needles, a rotating metal brush, and a fibreglass brush. To loosen hard products of copper corrosion, a 10% solution of sodium versenate was used. After removal of the outer layer of corrosion, a test for active corrosion was conducted (in a sealed humid environment), but it did not give positive results for any of the objects. The finds were subsequently dried, traces of grease and dirt were removed with acetone and the surfaces were protected with a layer of acrylic resin (Paraloid B72). Before applying the protective layer, the finds made of copper and its alloys were immersed in a stabilising solution of sodium sesquicarbonate ($\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3 + \text{NaHCO}_3$).

As a result of conservation work conducted this year, a total of 34 metal finds were treated, among them 17 iron objects, 15 artefacts made of copper and its alloys, and 2 silver finds. In the case of three objects: a silver ear-ring (Nd.99.110), an iron ornament of interconnected chain-links (Nd.00.64), and an iron rod (Nd.09.531), conservation should be continued in the forthcoming season.

Study of coins

The investigation of Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid coins (dinars and dirhams) uncovered to date in the monastic complex was conducted by Dr Gisela Helmecke from the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin. The bulk of the material consisted of the hoard found in 2009, which contained 80 coins and coin fragments. It was possible to offer a better identification of many fragments as a result of the cleaning conducted by the conservator during this campaign. Some dates, personal names and mint names, unclear in the preliminary stage of research on these fragments, were clarified. Several fragments were identified or corrected and, thus, placed in their correct historical context. Eleven of these dinars represent a very important period in Egyptian history: the about 50 years of the Tulunid governors (until 905) of Abbasid caliphs, which were residing in that time in Samarra and after 883 again in Baghdad. Therefore at the Tulunid coins always the name of the caliph is mentioned besides their own name. The Tulunid dinars found in the Naqlun hoard were minted during the time of three caliphs, al-Mu'tamid 'ala-llah (AH 256–279/AD 870–892), al-Mu'tadid bi-llah (AH 279–289/AD 892–902) and al-Muktafi bi-llah (AH 289–295/AD 902–908), and they were ordered by two Tulunids, Khumarawaih (AH 270–282 AH/AD 883–895), the son of the founder of the Tulunid dynasty, Ahmad bin Tulun, and Harun (AH

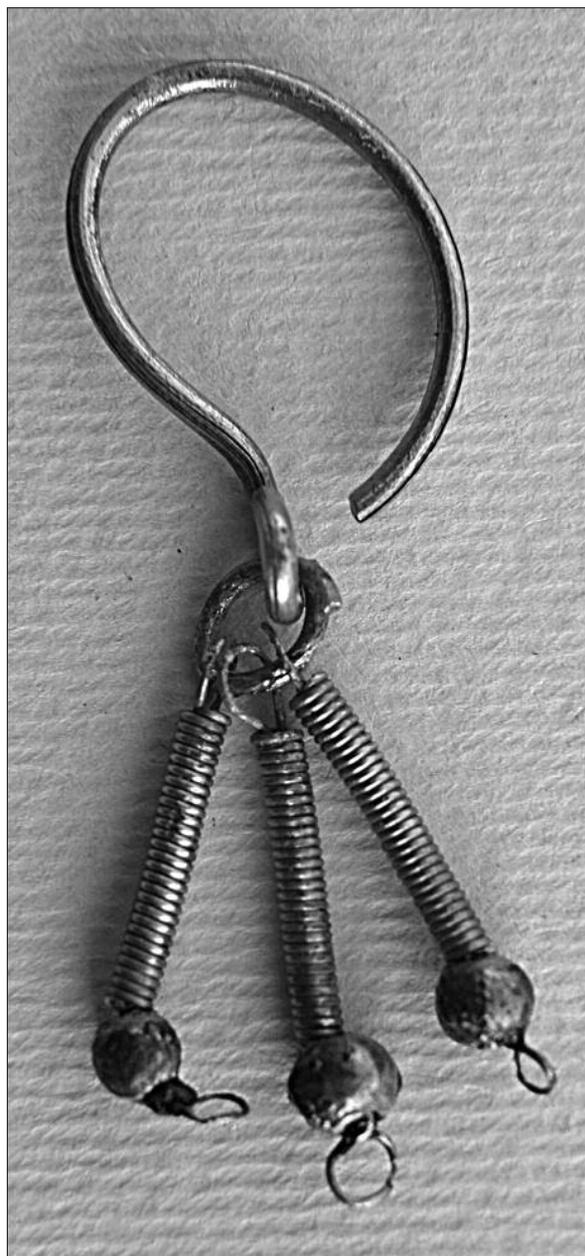


Fig. 10. A silver earring (Tomb T.099; Nd.99.110) (Photo W. Godlewski; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 10. Srebrny koleczyk z grobu T.099 (Nd.99.110).

283–292/AD 896–904), son of Khumarawaih. A double part of twenty two Abbasid dinars and fragments of dinars in this hoard were minted in the period of the caliph al-Muqtadir bi-llah. This is not very surprising because this caliph had a long reign of nearly 25 years (AH 295–320/AD 908–932), until he was murdered at least. The latest identifiable Abbasid coins in the hoard were minted under the caliph ar-Radi bi-llah (AH 322–329/AD 934–940) in the year AH 325/AD 936–937. These coins are in the same time the latest identifiable dinars found in Deir al-Malak until now. A small group of seven items in this hoard are no Egyptian coins. These are coins of the dynasty

of the Aghlabids, which were set by the Abbasid caliphs as governors over parts of North Africa like the Tulunids over Egypt. They ruled about 100 years until 909, when the uprising Fatimids occupied their territory completely. Six of these Aghlabid items in the hoard are dinar fragments. The only fully preserved coin is a small dirham minted in the reign of Emir Ibrahim II al-Aghlab (AH 261–289/AD 874–902) in the year AH 273/AD 886–887.

Study of mud stoppers

Studies on mud stoppers found at Naqlun were continued by Dr Dorota Dzierzbicka from the University of Warsaw. One of the main objectives was the study of stamp impressions, the identification and cataloguing of ico-

nographic representations, as well as the deciphering of inscriptions and monograms. Fragmentary impressions of rims, necks, handles and shoulders of amphorae, which the stoppers once sealed, were documented. Based on the latter, a large group of the stoppers was associated with LRA 7 and LRA 5/6 amphorae dating from the 6th and 7th c. A preliminary investigation of the material from which the stoppers were made suggests that it originated in both alluvial and desert environments.

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NAQLUN, EGIPT. WYKOPALISKA SEZONU 2012

Misja Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (Centrum Archeologii Śródziemnomorskiej) pracowała w Naqlun, na stanowisku monastycznym, w okresie od 1 do 26 września 2012 roku, kontynuując wieloletni program badawczy nad zabudową koptyjskiego klasztoru. Prowadzono także prace konserwatorskie nad zabytkami metalowymi odkrytymi

w sezonach wcześniejszych, jak również studia nad monetami arabskimi pochodzącymi z pomieszczeń monastycznych. Szersza informacja z prac misji w 2012 roku, jak również w latach wcześniejszych, znajduje się na stronie internetowej UW: www.polacynadnilem.uw.edu.pl