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Naqlun (Nekluni): Preliminary Report, 2005

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NAQLUN (NEKLONI)

PRELIMINARY REPORT, 2005

Włodzimierz Godlewski

Continued excavations of a complex of monastic architecture situated in the central part of the kom at Naqlun in Fayum Oasis were the main objective of a mission from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University, which worked on the site of the monastery of Nekloni from September 3 until October 9, 2005.¹ The digging was concentrated in three areas: Building G north of Tower A, trench S.1-3 (30 by 5 m) south of Tower A, and a trial-pit by the eastern wall of the Church of Archangel Gabriel. Complementing the regular fieldwork were specialist studies on previously excavated material, including Coptic documents discovered in 2004 and 2005 (J. van der Vliet); Arabic documents discovered in 2003-2005 (Ch. Gaubert); textiles discovered in 2003 and 2004 (G. Helmecke); jewelry from Cemetery A uncovered in previous seasons (D. Dziedzic); pottery uncovered in 2005 and in previous seasons (M. Żurek); bricks and building techniques in Naqlun (S. Maślak).²

1 The mission, directed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski, included: Ms Dorota Dziedzic, Mr. Szymon Maślak, Mr. Grzegorz Ochała, Dr. Magdalena Żurek, archaeologists; Dr. Jacques van der Vliet, coptologist; Dr. Christian Gaubert and Dr. Gisele Helmecke, arabists.

The work of the Mission proceeded effectively and efficiently thanks to the all-encompassing assistance of the SCA authorities, in Cairo, as well as in Fayum. The Mission would like to express its gratitude to Ms Rania Omar Hendawy and Mr. Mabruk Ahmed Tawfik, the inspectors assigned to the expedition, and to Mr. Ibrahim El-Ragab in charge of the Mission Storehouse in Naqlun. The hospitality of the Fayum Coptic monastic community and the personal involvement of Abuna Abraam in creating a proper environment for effective work is ever gratefully appreciated.

2 For previous work and preliminary reports on studies of particular categories of finds, see earlier volumes of *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*, as well as relevant articles in the Acts of an international symposium held in Fayum in February 2004: Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis, ed. Gawdat Gabra (Cairo, New York 2005).

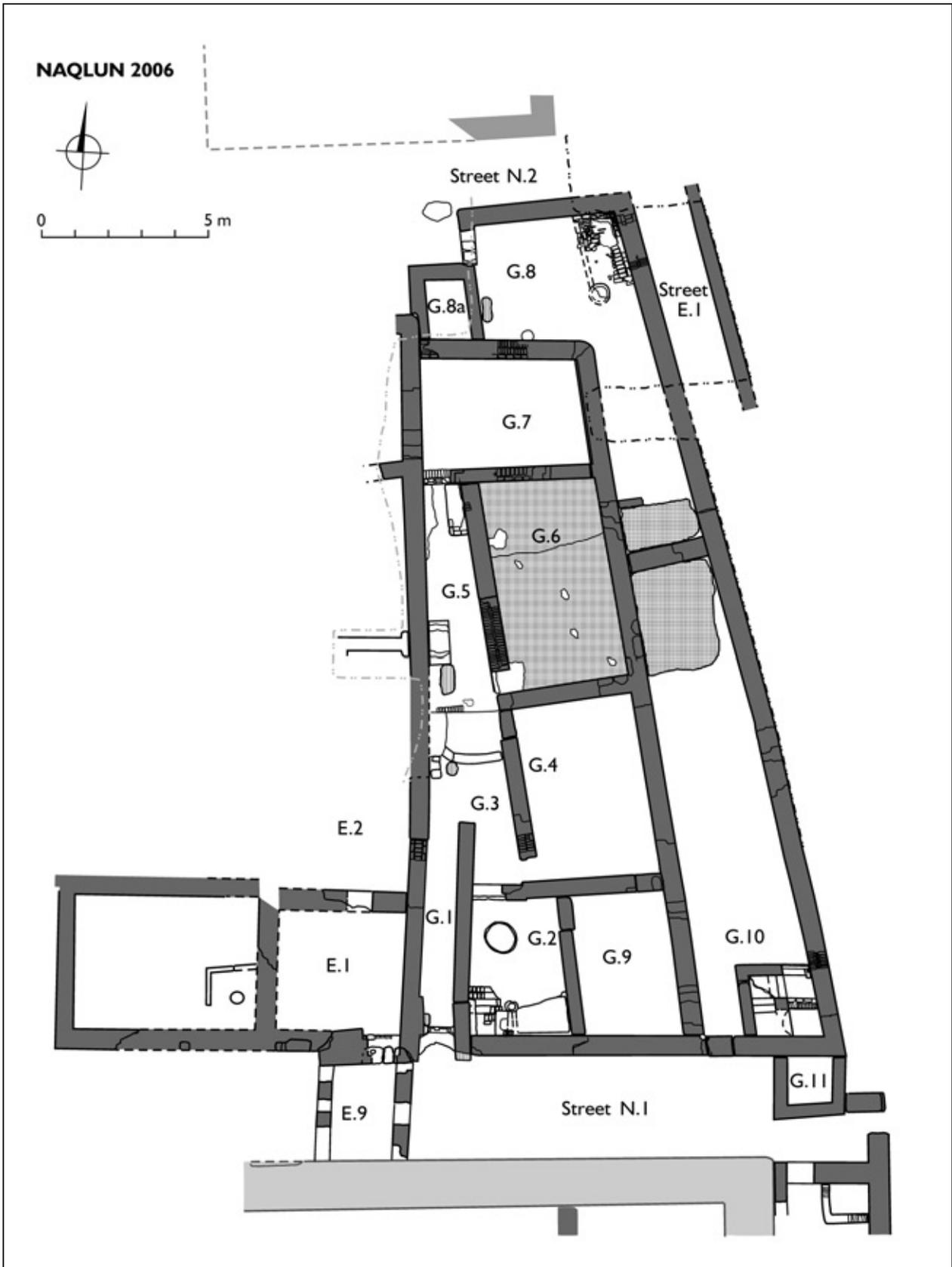


Fig. 1. Building G. Plan following explorations in season 2005
(Drawing W. Godlewski and S. Maślak)

MEDIEVAL MONASTIC ARCHITECTURE

Work continued on the monastic complex built presumably in the 10th century around the Church of Archangel Michael and gradually enlarged over the next few centuries. The object of excavations this season was Building G situated in the northeastern part of the complex, as well as sector S.1-3 situated to the south of the church.

BUILDING G

The building, which was partly explored in 2003 and 2004, has now been fully uncovered. With the northeastern part that was completed this season, it now comprises 11 rooms forming a long irregular complex between streets N.1 in the south (running alongside the northern

façade of the church) and N.2 in the north (separating it from Building D). It was accessed from these two streets, while the long wall alongside street E.1 in the east appears to be solid. Extant walls reach a height of 1.00-1.20 m, while there is every reason to suppose that the building never rose higher than the ground floor. The function of particular rooms could not be identified beyond all doubt, but the non-residential character of the building appears quite certain. Two of the rooms, G.2 and G.8, had basins built into the floor, another (G.10) contained a staircase doubling back on itself, constructed when the building was already standing.³ The steps presumably led to the terrace roof. The complex was built apparently in two

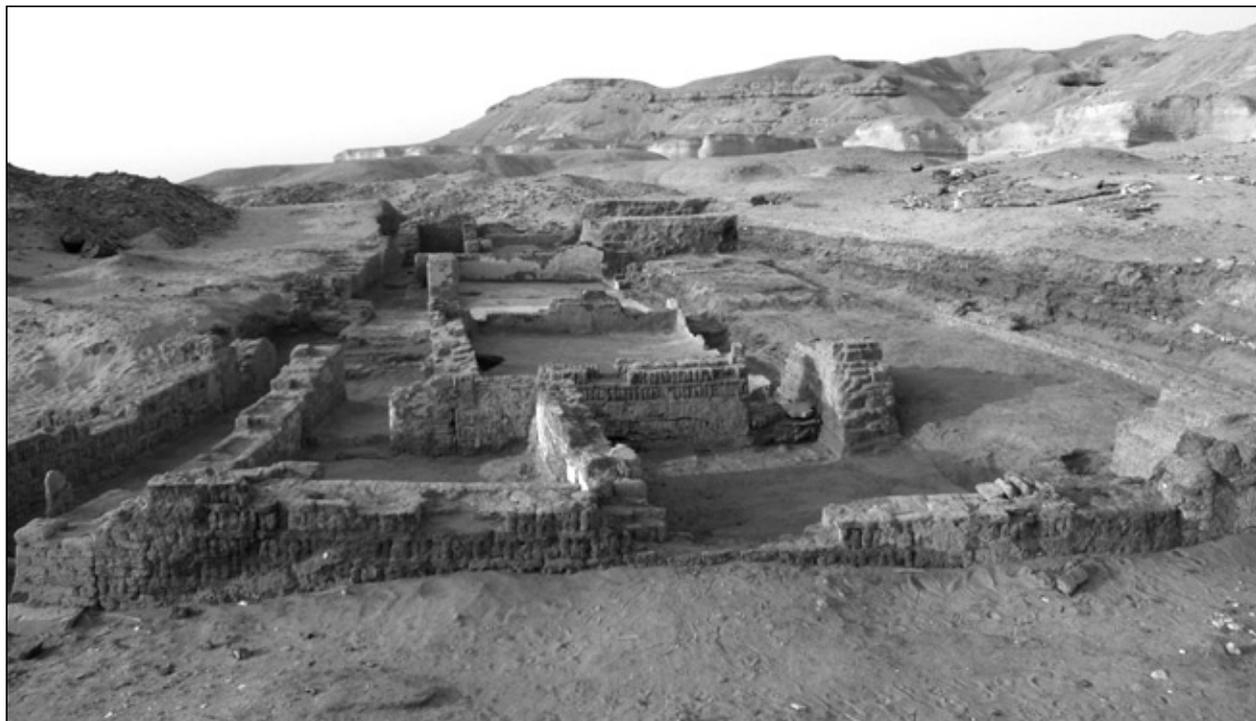


Fig. 2. General view of Building G after explorations in 2005, looking north (Photo W. Godlewski)

³ For a discussion of building material and techniques used in the construction of Building G, as well as its fixed furnishings, see article by S. Maślak in this volume.



*Fig. 3. Golden dinars, Nd.05.091
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

stages, achieving eventually c. 400 m² of ground surface [*Figs 1,2*].

The fill in the room with the staircase (G.10) yielded a small assemblage of documents, written in Arabic. Together with documents uncovered in previous seasons, the archive from this complex now amounts to over 60 documents in Coptic and Arabic. The documents date from the 10th-11th century. Besides letters and contracts, there are lists of individuals receiving goods in mostly small amounts (see below, contribution by Ch. Gaubert in this report). Some of the "economic" documents were written on parchment codices originating from the 8th-9th century in all likelihood. The texts suggest that Building G may have been used by the monastery as an administrative complex.

Thirteen dinars [*Fig. 3*] in good condition with only minor damages were found on the pavement in front of the north entrance to Building G. The coins have been identified as Fatimid. Eleven bear the name of Caliph-imam al-Mu^cizz (AD 952-976). Two of these were minted in al-Man-suriya (Sabra), Tunisia, in the years 344 H. (AD 955) and 361 H. (AD 972). The other nine coins were minted in Misr, Egypt: four are al-Mu^cizzi dinars from 363 H. (AD 973-974), one dates from year 364 H. (AD 975), and four from 365 H. (AD 976). The remaining two dinars were minted during the reign of Caliph-imam al-^cAziz (AD 976-996), son and successor of al-Mu^cizz. Both of these coins were minted in Misr, one in the year 367 (?) H., the other in 37[.] H. (in the 980s).

SECTOR S.1-S.3

In 2004, digging in the cemetery south of the latitudinal street S.1, which ran alongside the structures adjacent to the

church on the south, revealed the presence of well-preserved mud-brick walls (still rising to a height of 1.50 m). Two entrances were located on the side facing the church. To judge by the foundation level and the manner of founding, as well as by evidence of a severe conflagration on its walls, the building must have belonged to the original monastic compound of the 6th century, rebuilt in the 10th century after the monastery had burned down.

In the 2005 season, a trench 5 m wide and 30 m long was opened perpendicular to street S.1 [*Figs 4-5*] The entire area turned out to be occupied by monastic buildings provisionally dated to the 10th-11th century, the period of greatest development in the Naqlun monastery. The buildings were founded on earlier, 6th-century structures or on rising bedrock showing no leveling of the surface to speak of. The identified structures had extant floor levels, but lacked walls as a rule, these being either completely dismantled or preserved only fragmentarily to a height of no more than 0.50-0.75 m. The buildings from the 10th-11th century were industrial in character, as inferred also from Arabic texts concerning agricultural activities in which the monastery was involved.

Two coin dies, obverse and reverse, made of a hard metal alloy and used for minting dinars [*Fig. 6*] were found in a cache in the corner of a room in sector S.3. The dies can be dated provisionally to the Abbasid period (9th-10th century). Such objects, associated with the production of coins, are extremely rare finds and their presence in a monastic complex is startling at the very least.

The buildings in this complex were abandoned most probably in the late 12th century. The northern part became a burial

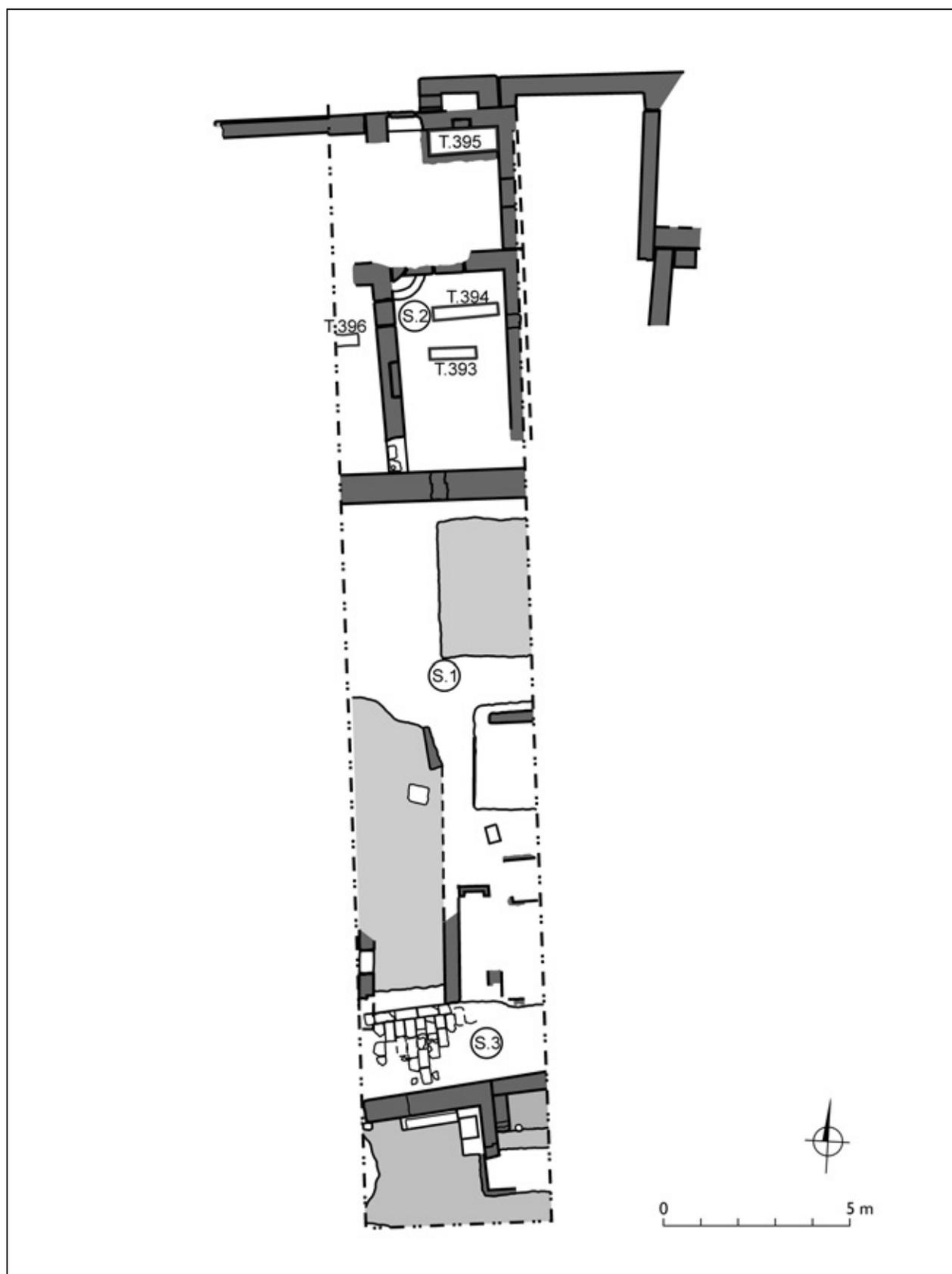


Fig. 4. Trench S.1-S.3, general plan after the season of 2005
(Drawing W. Godlewski and S. Maślak)

place for the Christian community in the 13th century. Only three tombs, T.393, T.394, and T.395, belonging to the extensive cemetery A were excavated, leaving other burials for exploration in an upcoming season.

Earlier structures, provisionally assigned to the 6th century, were uncovered in peripheral areas of the trench. One of these was the rather well-preserved Building J occupying the northern part of the trench (S.2 in *Fig. 4*). Its northern facade with two entrances leading from street S.1 had been

cleared in 2004. Explorations of the interior were interrupted due to the presence of burials, which could not be investigated this year.

At the southernmost end of the trench a pavement of limestone slabs was discovered. Only a fragment was explored and it is too early to hypothesize about the function of the structure it belonged to, but the quality of execution leaves no doubt that it must have been one of the more important buildings in the 6th-century monastery.



*Fig. 5. Trench S.1-S.3, general view looking south
(Photo W. Godlewski)*



Fig. 6. Coin dies, Nd.05.312 (side view and striking surface) and Nd.05.313 (side view, top striking surface and bottom mounting end) (Photo W. Godlewski)

STUDIES

The following are short reports on studies for which separate reports have not been submitted to the present volume of *PAM*. Contributions on the building material, pottery from a deposit in Building G and jewelry from the graves in Cemetery A can be found below in this volume.

COPTIC TEXTS

Dr. Jacques van der Vliet first studied the important administrative texts found during the 2004 season in what was later designated as room G.10. He completed the technical description of the documents and the study of the texts themselves, being able to verify and improve several of his earlier, provisional readings thanks to a close study of the originals.

A small group of texts found during the 2005 season in area S.1 also demanded his attention: apart from a brief administrative instruction in Coptic and Arabic (Nd.05.113; perhaps a real bilingual text, not a re-use!), the other texts are mainly liturgical. Among these are a bilingual (Greek-Bohairic Coptic) text of the opening verses of the service of the Holy Baptism (Nd.05.114), and a private copy (school text?) of a hymn in honor of Saint Theodore Anatolios (joined from two fragments: Nd.05.111 and Nd.05.124). All are quite fragmentary and appear to date, like the text found in the two previous seasons, from the 10th-11th century.

Van der Vliet also began preparations for publishing in book form the most important Coptic documentary texts from the excavations, among which the finds from the 2003 and 2004 seasons occupy an important place.

ARABIC TEXTS

Le Dr. Ch. Gaubert a consacré cette mission à l'étude du lot de papiers arabes découvert lors de la campagne de fouille de 2005. Ce lot est constitué de 25 papiers, dont 17 recto-versos, représentant 41 faces écrites; certains sont écrits en copte sur l'une des faces, et un document est bilingue, en copte et en arabe. Seuls 6 documents sont complets; l'état général va de quelques documents parfaitement conservés à d'autres très lacunaires ou détériorés par le sel et l'humidité.

La datation des 6 documents datés s'étale de 400 à 450 H., soit 1013 à 1059 Apr J.-C.; ces documents donc parfaitement contemporains des archives de Girga découvertes à Naqlun en 1997; certains types de documents sont identiques (lettres privées ou commerciales) et d'écriture semblable.

Le document Nd.05.107 [Fig. 7] est un papier contenant sur chaque face un compte de réception de produits agricoles (grains) de la part de 9 (recto) et 6 (verso) producteurs différents, pour du blé, de l'orge et du fowl.⁴ Les quantités portées, vendues et restantes y sont consignées en chiffres coptes, et des totaux récapitulatifs des quantités indiqués. Les chiffres sont les chiffres *epact* en vigueur à cette époque. L'unité des comptes ne semble pas clairement mentionnée. Deux listes annexes, de nature encore obscure, complètent ce document.

Les documents Nd.05.121v, 123, 126, 127 et 130 s'apparentent aussi à des listes de prix. On peut penser, sans certitude, qu'il s'agit de décomptes administratifs ayant trait à l'intendance du monastère au XI^e siècle.

4 Ce document a fait l'objet d'un atelier de travail (workshop) que Ch. Gaubert animé lors de la troisième conférence ISAP (International Society for Arabic Papyrology) tenue à Alexandrie du 23 au 26 mars 2007.

Le type de document le plus fréquent reste celui des lettres, le plus souvent à sujet commercial, parfois très courtes (billets), allant de la simple reconnaissance de dette à l'enregistrement de petites transactions; il semble qu'il s'agisse avant tout de marchandises agricoles, au premier rang desquelles se trouve le blé.

Quelques lettres privées, au contenu souvent très difficile à cerner, viennent compléter cet ensemble.

Si très peu de toponymes sont présents dans ces documents, ils recèlent en revanche

quelques noms de personnes, et révèlent une activité économique essentiellement agricole.

TEXTILES

Dr. Gisele Helmecke studied textiles uncovered in seasons 2003 and 2004.⁵ First, all the textiles were checked for inscriptions and those lacking such features were not taken into consideration. About 40 fragments of textiles were examined in greater detail. On textiles from 2003 no inscriptions were found. Of the texts

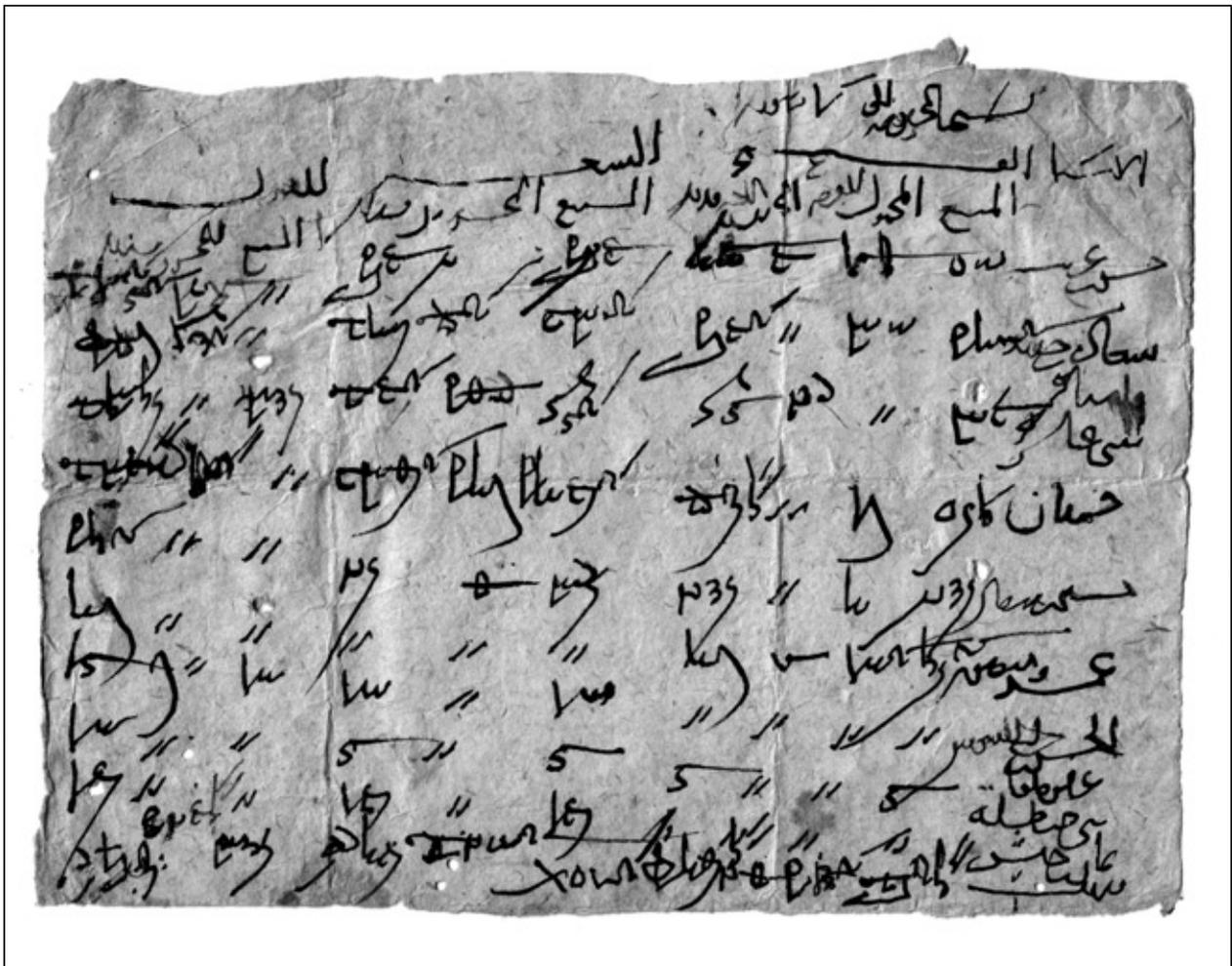


Fig. 7. Arabic document, Nd.05.107, verso
(Photo W. Godlewski)

5 Dr. Helmecke's work complemented her conclusions presented in a preliminary study published in *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005), 195-202.

brought to light in 2004, 16 had calligraphic elements and only seven had more or less readable inscriptions.

The examined textiles can be divided into two groups according to technique: tapestry and embroidery. Among the tapestries there are two fragments representing a late 11th century style, bearing repetitions of the abbreviation for "Allah" in two different versions (Nd.04.259, Nd.04.006). The other fragments, in 12th century style, also carry repeating words or short phrases in *kufi*-like or *naskhi*-like letters. Legible on Nd.04.257 is a repeating phrase, either *nasr min allah* ("help from God") or *yumn min allah* ("good luck from God"). An ornamental *kufi*-like inscription on Nd.04.210 can be deciphered as a repetition of either *al-mulk* or *al-malik*.

Fragments of *kufi*-like inscriptions on Nd.04.076 should perhaps be read as abbreviated versions of *al-mulk li-allah* ("the power belongs to God").

There is only one piece, Nd.04.112, which could be a real *tiraz* fragment. It is made of precious materials and adorned with two lines of *kufi* inscription in the style common late in the reign of Caliph al-Mustansir (1035-1094) and his successor al-Musta^cli (1094-1101). Unfortunately, the gaps in the inscription proved too extensive for a reasonable reading of the text.

In the embroidery group (Nd.04.055; Nd.04.255; Nd.04.283), the decoration consists of typical letter-like ornaments. One of the pieces (Nd.04.090), however, has as the main ornament a partly legible inscription beginning with *bism* ... ("In the name of ...").