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JEWELRY FROM CEMETERY A AT NAQLUN

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Research at the archaeological site of Deir el-Naqlun in the season of 2005 included the study of jewelry found in burials at Cemetery A in previous campaigns. The finds were cleaned, drawn, and photographed and an attempt was made at establishing a typology of the objects. The following is a preliminary report on the findings.

Cemetery A is a Christian burial ground the use of which has been dated to the period from the second half of the 11th century to the late 14th century.[1] Of the 396 burials excavated so far, 47 contained jewelry.

Among the examined finds were various metal objects: earrings, rings, belt buckles, bracelets, pins, one cross, and one medallion. Mechanical cleaning of the objects and the removal of a layer of corrosion revealed that they were made of gold, silver, bronze and various alloys, often difficult to determine precisely based only on the macroscopic analysis of the surface brought to light. The most problematic pieces were those made of iron; heavy corrosion has caused irreversible deformation of the objects, impeding proper examination and documentation.

A considerable number of finds was made of glass. Aside from a small glass bracelet, the objects in question were beads, forming part of necklaces and bracelets, or adorning earrings. There were five necklaces, five bracelets (two found in one burial) and over a dozen loose beads.

Burial T.280 was especially rich. The deceased was wearing a bead necklace and four rings, of which two were silver and two presumably of tortoise shell.

BELT BUCKLES

Four belt buckles were found. One of the better preserved pieces in this category was Nd.00.205 [*Fig. 1*], a small, bronze buckle that was once attached to a belt or strap roughly up to 1.5 cm wide. There are V-shaped marks, one on each side, on the horizontal bar in the middle. The pin of the buckle was looped around the bar on one end, and the other end fitted into a rounded depression in the frame of the buckle. Another buckle that deserves attention is made of bone (Nd.00.152) [cf. *Fig. 1*]. The belt it was used with measured at most one centimeter in width. The pin is missing, but there is a depression on the frame, similar to the one described above. The pin was mounted on a bar inserted into the buckle frame, fitted in a round hole drilled in one side and blocked on the other. The buckle is decorated: horizontal grooves were incised in the middle, and diagonal lines were cut on both sides of the depression. Two other buckles, of iron and copper alloy, were in a rather poor state of preservation, which impaired further analysis.

1 W. Godlewski, "The medieval Coptic cemetery at Naqlun", in: Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayum Oasis, ed. G. Gabra (Cairo 2005), 173-183.

RINGS

Ten rings were uncovered altogether, four of which in one burial. Four were of gold alloy, two presumably of tortoise shell, two silver, and two bronze. Two nearly identical rings found together in T.280 are probably made of tortoise shell. They have a simple, clean-cut design, are polished smooth and lack decoration. Another pair of rings very similar to one another (one slightly larger) was found in T.291. Each was made of gold alloy, hammered into a flat band forming a circle with overlapping ends. Five rings were elaborately decorated. Each pattern is different. One damaged ring (Nd.02.094; cf. *Fig. 2*) is made of a cast strip of metal with a visible seam and uneven sides. The outer surface is decorated with diagonal lines. Another cast silver ring (Nd.02.095, cf. *Fig. 2*) is a flat band the decoration of which seems to imitate a belt with a buckle and rivets. It has relief decoration of circles with rivets in the centers.[2] Nd.00.042 [cf. *Fig. 2*], made of hammered bronze or perhaps gold alloy, was a flat band with chased, linear decoration on the outer surface, consisting of vertical, horizontal

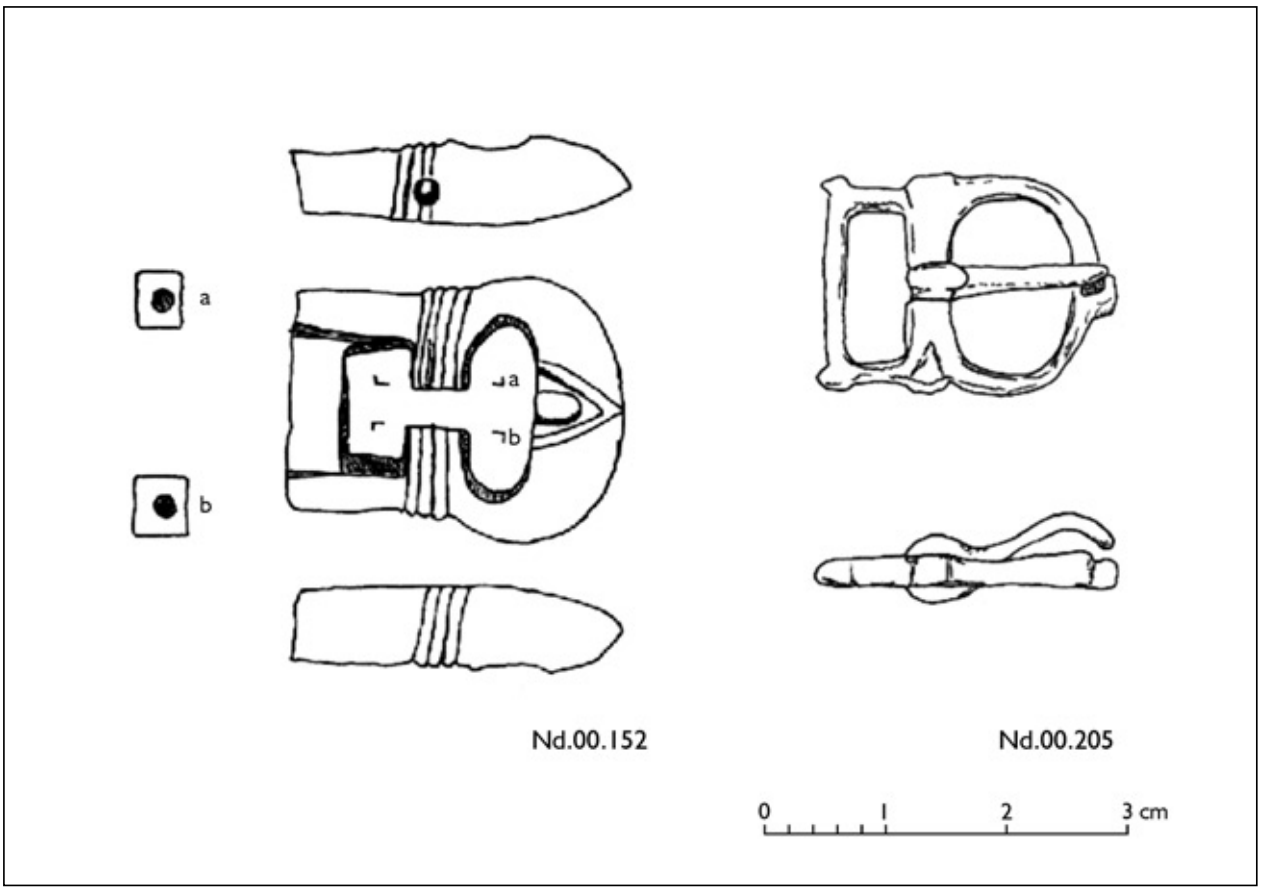

Fig. 1. Belt buckles from burial contexts in Cemetery A (Drawing D. Dziedzic)

2 Other objects decorated with this popular motif: D. Bénazeth, Musée du Louvre. Catalogue du Département des antiquités égyptiennes. L'art du métal au début de l'ere chrétienne (Paris 1992), 186, bracelets E 17350 and E 17351. The latter, however, have punched decoration.

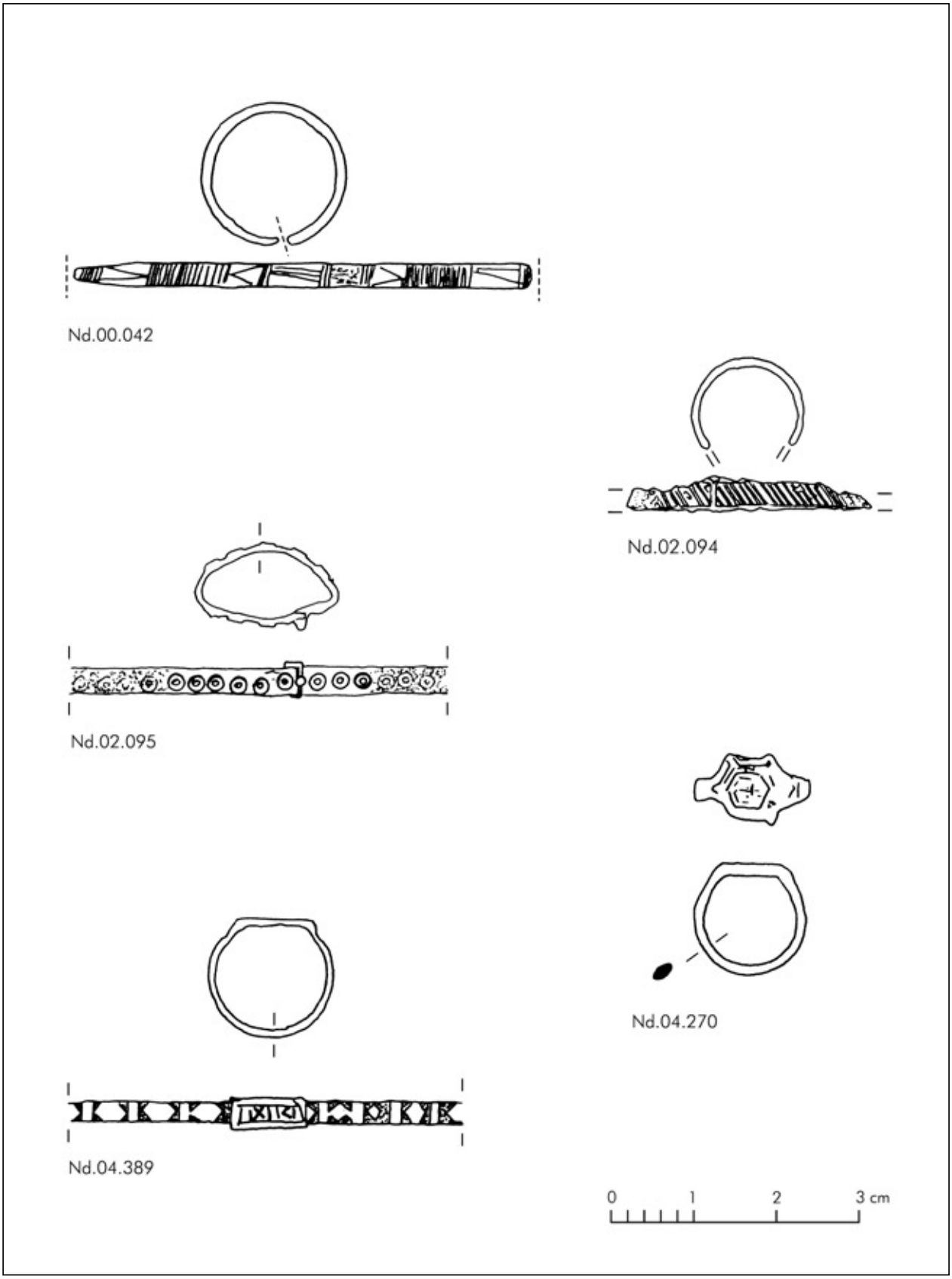

Fig. 2. Rings from burial contexts in Cemetery A (Drawing D. Dziedzic)

Fig. 3. Selection of jewelry from burial contexts in Cemetery A (Photo W. Godlewski)

and diagonal lines. Nd.04.389 [cf. *Fig. 2*] was cast from a similar material. It has a flat, narrow strip forming a bezel with line decoration on top, and a band adorned with a geometrical pattern of convex lozenges and vertical lines.[3] Nd.04.270 [cf. *Fig. 2*] is a bronze ring with a flat, hexagonal, decorated sheet of bronze forming a bezel. Decoration of the bezel is composed of incised lines forming concentric hexagons around a cross in the centre.

CROSSES

Devotional articles form a separate category among the finds. There were 13 altogether and they were recorded only in children's graves.[4] They include mostly small crosses worn around the neck. Two of these were made of mother-of-pearl, cut in the form of *crux gemmata*. The larger one (Nd.98.585, *Fig. 3*) was particularly attractive. On top it once had a hanger loop (now broken), and all four arms are of equal length. The surface on both sides was cut to form a central square panel, ribbing on the arms and triangular panels on the ends of the arms. The smaller cross (Nd.00.021, *Fig. 3*) was cut to similar shape, but it is thinner and the surface is not decorated. A hole was drilled through the end of the top arm, front to back. The four small bone crosses [*Fig. 4*] were bilaterally decorated by turning on a wheel and incising. Two diagonal lines were cut to form a cross in the middle and shallow holes were drilled

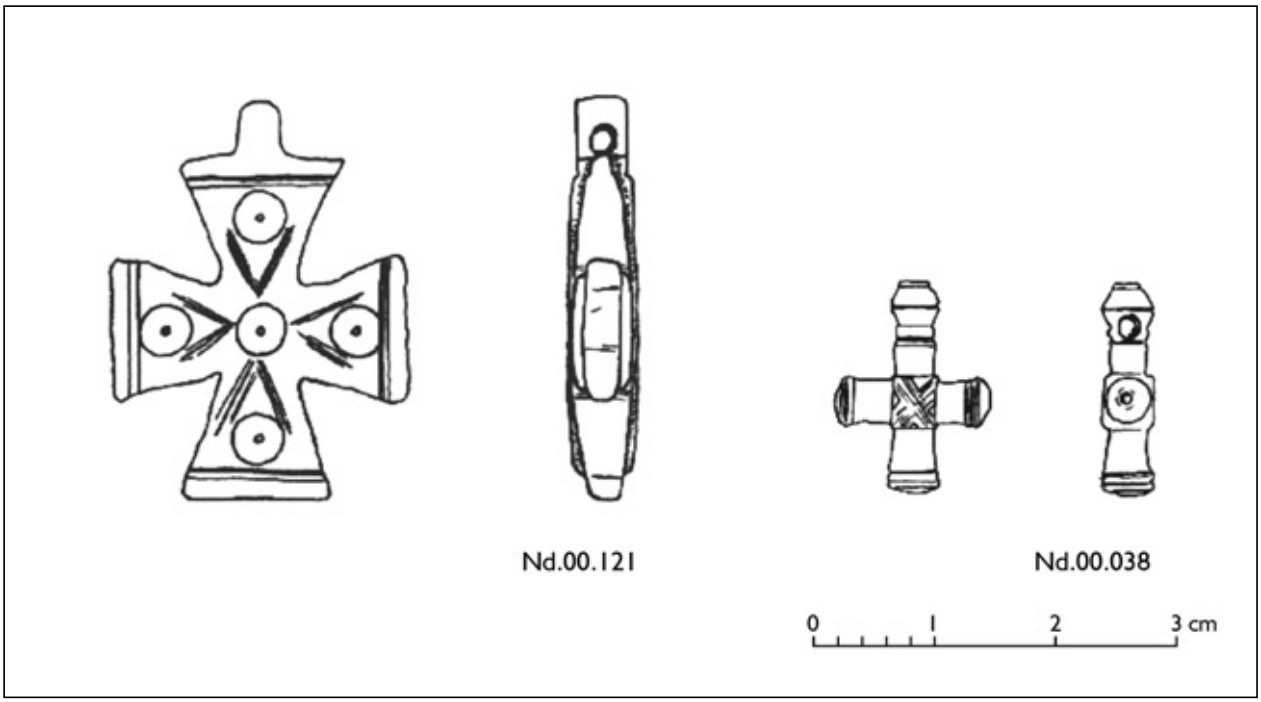

Fig. 4. Small wood (left) and bone crosses from burial contexts in cemetery A (Drawing D. Dziedzic)

3 A somewhat similar motif is found on an iron bracelet (AF 1440, Bénazeth, Louvre, op. cit., 195) probably found by H. Henne in Edfu.

4 Godlewski, "The medieval Coptic cemetery at Naqlun", op. cit., 182.

on the sides of the arms. A perforation was drilled through the top of the longest arm. Wheel-turned lines run around the arms. Four crosses were made of wood. All of them had short, flared arms and an opening drilled through a protrusion on top. Both sides were decorated with simple, incised, concentric circles. The largest of the wooden crosses (Nd.00.121, cf. *Fig. 4*) had the most elaborate decoration: incised circles in the centre and on the arms, V-shaped incisions stretching out from the central circle to the sides of the circles on the arms, and lines parallel to the edges of arms. One cross was made of iron. A flat, hammered band folded to form a cross shape with an empty centre. At the top a hanger loop was attached. One cross (Nd.02.140, *Fig. 3*) was made of plaited leather straps, resembling the ones worn by Coptic monks nowadays. It was presumably affixed with similarly plaited ropes to the body of the deceased, on the tunic.[5]

EARRINGS

Twenty pieces were uncovered altogether. More than half of them (12) are probably gold and the rest silver. Eight pieces were found in pairs and one in a group of five. The wire used to make all earrings but one was strip-drawn and the loops were closed by either winding the ends around the wire itself or by forming two interlocking hooks. The only exception is a damaged earring (or ring?); it consists of a loop made of silver wire of square cross-section twisted around its axis.[6] The most basic type was a plain hoop with ends twisted around the wire, a fairly popular form in Roman and Coptic jewelry (e.g. Nd.99.107, *Fig. 5*).[7] In one pair of earrings (Nd.99.111, cf. *Fig. 5*), such hoops served for hanging decorative pendant elements consisting of a smaller hoop and a drop-shaped bead of transparent green glass, attached to it by a fixing link. Another group of earrings was made on the basis of a hoop closed by interlocking two hooks made at the ends of the wire. The hooks then also served for attaching various pendants. A group of five gold pieces (Nd.99.214, *Fig. 3*) and one silver pair had small, irregular leaves of gold and silver, respectively, attached to such loops either directly (the silver) or by means of fixing links with beads (the gold ones). The other pendants on this type of basic hoop were as follows: In Nd.99.110 (cf. *Fig. 5*), a link passes through the loop and carries three pendants. Each pendant is made of wire, tightly wound around a central core to form a spool with a metal bead at the end. The bead is attached to the spool by means of a wire, which passes vertically through its hole and forms a loop at the end. Another such earring (Nd.99.106, cf. *Fig. 5*) has a pendant made of intertwined

5 Loc. cit.

6 Similar iron objects identified as rings had open ends folded to form small loops: Bénazeth, Louvre, op. cit., 198, AF 1447, AF 1448, and 199, AF 1449 excavated by H. Henne in Edfu and dated to the Coptic or Islamic period. An anklet in this form was also found at Qasr Ibrim, 193.33B.1 (A.J. Mills, The Cemeteries of Qasr Ibrim, Report of the Excavations Conducted by W.B. Emery in 1961 (London 1982), 49 and Pl. LV).

7 Bénazeth, Louvre, op. cit., 202: cast iron ring, inv. no. AF 1131, originating from Antinoe, excavations of A. Gayet, dated to the Roman or Coptic period. Also: Petrie Museum UC 6583-4.

silver threads. Earrings of the third group are gold, open hoops with sheets of gold folded around one end of the wire and forming a cylindrical bead. Three such earrings were found (among them Nd.97.250, cf. *Fig. 5)*.

BRACELETS

Twelve bracelets were found. Five pieces were of iron and, unfortunately, four of these were heavily corroded. The only better-preserved piece was a bangle bracelet flattened on the sides by hammering to form a band with rectangular cross-section. The outer edge of the bracelet is irregularly scalloped.[8] One silver bracelet was of hammered, twisted wire of square cross-section.[9] One small bangle bracelet was of black glass.[10] The remaining five bracelets were made with strung beads. Two (Nd.99.105, *Fig. 3*) were made with agate beads, 18 beads each. One was made of 26 beads, roughly half of them bone and the other half glass, and one shell. One bracelet was made solely of 17 yellow and amber-colored, wound glass beads and another of 27 wound glass beads of various colors and shapes.

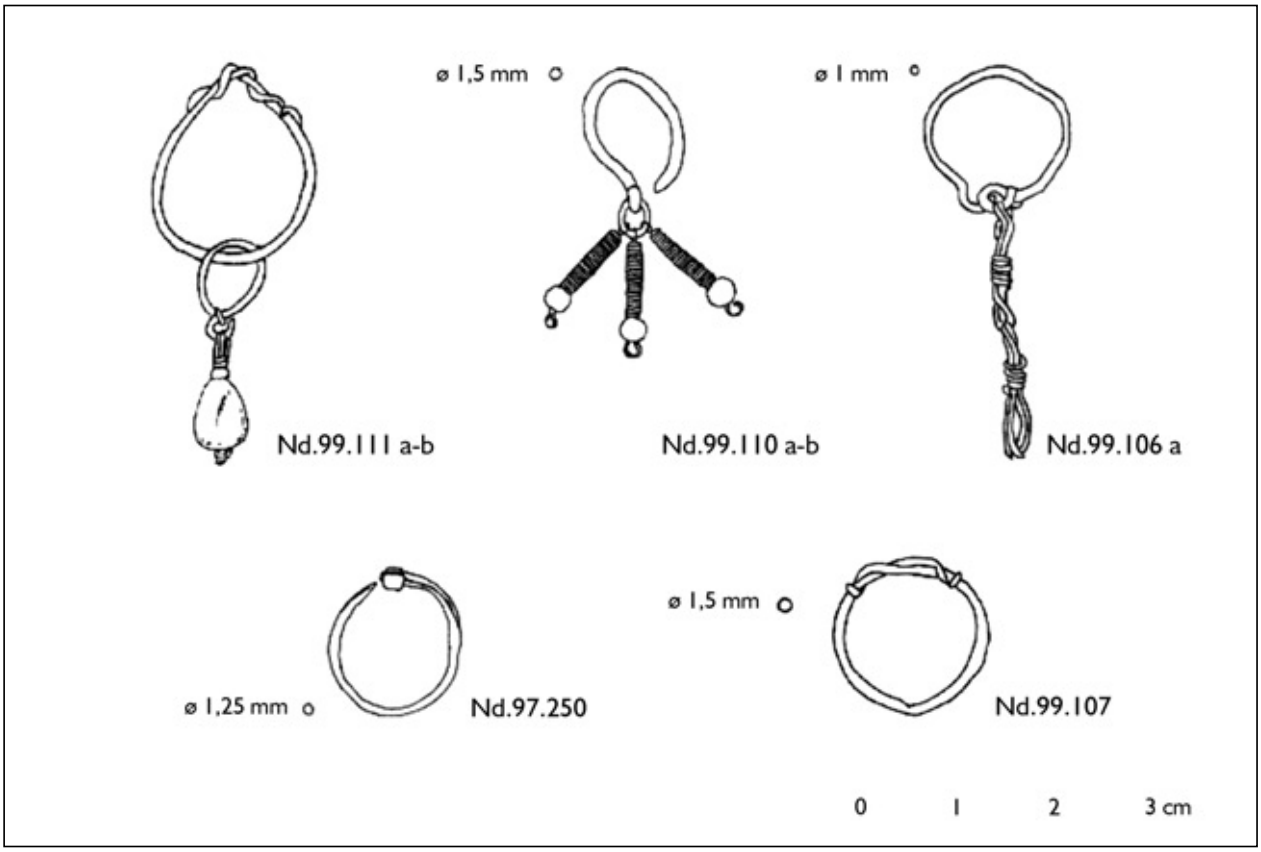

Fig. 5. Earrings from burial contexts in Cemetery A (Drawing D. Dziedzic)

8 Mills, Qasr Ibrim, op. cit., 193.140.5, 63, Pl. LXVIII.

9 Petrie Museum: UC 58937 (Roman bronze bracelet, presumably from Memphis).

10 Petrie Museum: UC 22964; for more parallels, see Egyptian Museum, items T 91832-T 91835, with no indication as to the dating or provenance.

NECKLACES

Four bead necklaces were found. One (Nd.02.076) was made predominantly of glass beads, but there were also some of bone, crystalline quartz, carnelian, and plant seed. Glass was also the main material used in necklace Nd.02.096; also present were beads of shell, coral, bone, crystalline quartz, and carnelian. An interesting piece (Nd.04.350) was made of strung cloves and nutmeg, alternated with a few beads of glass, crystalline quartz and carnelian. Another equally interesting necklace (Nd.00.062) was made of plant seeds with a few beads of glass, bone and semiprecious stone, i.e., carnelian and alabaster.

OTHER PIECES

The other finds included one medallion, three pins, and one diadem made of silver dirhams found adorning the head of the deceased.[11] There was a fragment of bone pin with a broken, whittled stem of square cross-section and a wheel-turned head with collar underneath. Two copper alloy hair pins (Nd.02.325, *Fig. 3*) had decorated heads, hammered flat, one to form a "heart" with spiral line decoration on one side, the other a "spade" with some form of relief decoration on both sides. Approximately one centimeter of the pin under the head is shaped to imitate a profiling in the repeating pattern of two rings, one bead. The medallion (Nd.99.108, *Fig. 3*) is a flat, round sheet of metal, presumably bronze, with irregular edges and three holes, one in the centre and two on the sides. One side of the medallion is decorated with punched dots forming a solar motif.

BEADS

Besides natural elements such as plant seeds and aromatic spices (cloves and nutmeg), other materials used for making beads included semiprecious stones, bone, coral, shell and glass. Nearly half (207 out of 426) of the uncovered man-made beads is made of glass.

The stone used for making beads was predominantly crystalline quartz and carnelian cut to form faceted or tumbled bicones and spheres.[12] Two bracelets found in one burial were made solely of agate beads, encountered only in one other grave. Both Egyptian and imported glass beads were found. The dominant colors are blue, green, and yellow, but there are also a few white and black ones. The oldest seems to be a Roman so-called "date bead", made by folding a heated plaque of green and yellow glass around a wire and joining the two ends.[13] Some types of drawn beads have been tentatively identified as Fustat prod-

11 W. Godlewski, "Naqlun season 2003. Excavation in Cemetery A", *PAM XV, Reports 2003* (2004), 145.

12 See J.S. Kirkman, The Arab City of Gedi, Excavations at the Great Mosque. Architecture and Finds (Oxford 1954), 146 and Figs 35 and 36.

13 P. Francis Jr., "Beads", in: Fustat Finds. Beads, Coins, Medical Instruments, Textiles and Other Artifacts from the Awad Collection, ed. J.L. Bacharach (Cairo 2002), 14 and Fig. 1.

ucts, "slumped beads"[14] and "striped beads",[15] both dark blue. The drawn beads are a minority compared to the large number and variety of wound beads. Among the wound beads there were several "melon beads" made by grooving the side of the bead into lobes,[16] and a large number of wound, segmented beads. Two beads were "mirror decoration beads" made as disks of mosaic glass with concentric white and black circles heated until soft and skewered through the centre, folded in half and the edges fused together. This process resulted in a characteristic design and seam pattern. In the case of one bead, the disk was adorned with yellow "eyes".[17] Two beads are faience. Lastly, a large group (15 pieces) is constituted by beads most probably imported from Sung-Yuan, China. This production centre, active from the 10th to the 14th century, produced "coil beads" made by winding a thin thread of hot glass around a wire.[18]

14 Francis, Beads, op. cit., 17; The beads were not examined under ultraviolet light to see if they exhibit a yellow fluorescence characteristic of beads Francis tentatively identified as Fustat products, but the similarities in size, color and production method justify the analogy with this group of Fustat beads.

15 Francis, Beads, op. cit., 18, tentatively.

16 Francis, Beads, op. cit., 28 and Fig. 19.

17 Egyptian Museum items GLS.VS.01010 and GLS.VS.00987: www.virtual-egyptian-museum.org/Glass/Highlights/Glass.Highlights-FR.html; M. Spaer, Ancient Glass in the Israel Museum: Beads and other Small Objects (Jerusalem 1998), nos 184-187, n.v.

18 Francis, Beads, op. cit., 24-25. Identification is based on the similarity of the Naqlun finds to Chinese beads from Fustat. No tests were performed to check for the presence of lead in the beads, which could confirm their Chinese provenance.